CAN'T WE ALL GET ALONG? A TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP MODEL FOR DEVELOPING SPIRITUAL MATURITY THROUGH FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

Henry A. Gregory, III

BA, Brewton-Parker College, 2004
M.Ed., Troy University, 2005
M.Min., United Theological Seminary, 2021

Mentors

J. Elvin Sadler, DMin
David M. Nelson, DMin

A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Dayton, Ohio
May 2025

United Theological Seminary
Dayton, OH

Faculty Approval Page
Doctor of Ministry Final Project

CAN'T WE ALL GET ALONG? A TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP MODEL FOR DEVELOPING SPIRITUAL MATURITY THROUGH FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

by

Henry A. Gregory, III

United Theological Seminary, 2025

Mentors

J. Elvin Sadler, DMin
David M. Nelson, DMin

Date: _____

Approved:

_____

_____
Faculty Mentor:

_____
Associate Dean of Doctoral Studies:

Copyright © 2025 Henry A. Gregory, III
All rights reserved

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT iv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS v

DEDICATION vii

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER

1. MINISTRY FOCUS 5
2. BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS 25
3. HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS 48
4. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS 67
5. INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS 101
6. PROJECT ANALYSIS 121

BIBLIOGRAPHY 164

ABSTRACT

CAN'T WE ALL GET ALONG? A TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP MODEL FOR DEVELOPING SPIRITUAL MATURITY THROUGH FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

by
Henry A Gregory, III
United Theological Seminary, 2025

Mentors

David Nelson, DMin
J. Elvin Sadler, DMin

This context is New Home African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in York, South Carolina. The church experienced significant hurt that kept its members from forgiving. Unforgiveness overshadowed peace and mistrust. These concerns must be addressed before the church can reach spiritual maturity. If the members of New Home AME Zion Church are taught about the effects of unforgiveness, they will increase their willingness to forgive. This project was a six-week training program that educated members spiritually, theologically, and theoretically about the benefits of forgiveness and reconciliation. The assessment included pre- and post-training surveys, focus groups, and guided journals.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To God be the glory for the great things God has done! Only God could have brought this project to pass. To Trea L. Gregory, who has held me down in prayer throughout this entire process, having a wife like you to take up the slack and encourage me along the way. To my children, Chanise, Sojourner, and Henry IV (Q). The three of you have always made me want to set an example of excellence in every area of life. To my grandchildren, DeMari, McKenzie, Hailey, K'Lynn, Riley, Honor, and Emory, the life-long pleasure of being called Pappa by such wonderful grandchildren is all mine.

To the late Bettye Mae, Henry A. Gregory Sr., and Mary Ema Harvey (grandparents), I am grateful for the way your loving hands nurtured me as I grew from a child into adulthood. To my siblings, Tonja (sister) and George (brother), I am grateful to God for the things he has done in each of your lives and for your encouragement along the way.

To my circle of friends: Bishop M.L. Jackson, Pastor Sinclair Thorne, and Dr. Sharon Sauls, true life-long friendship is a gift from God, and you have been just that, a gift from God. To my church family, past and current, God has blessed me with some of the best people in the kingdom to do the work of ministry. To my Professional Associate, Dr. Denita Armstrong-Shaffer, for your patience, guidance, and friendship along this journey. I am grateful to God for the wisdom you shared with me. To my other

Professional Associate, Rev. Dr. Jerret Fite, our newfound friendship and comradery, along with your heart for helping, has fueled my journey.

To my friend and brother, Bishop Brian R. Thompson, Sr., for your love and support for my family and me. I also appreciate your nudge toward UTS and the Sadler Fellow tribe. To my mentors, Rev. Dr. Elvin Sadler and Rev. Dr. David Nelson, thank you for all the spiritual and academic wisdom you have given me during this process.

To my editor, Dr. Lori Spears, my gratitude is endless. Thank you for your encouragement and friendship. You are the best!

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my parents' never-ending love and leadership, Presiding Elder Henry A. Gregory, Jr. (deceased) and Deaconess Coleen H. Gregory. You have been the driving force behind my desire to live a good life. Mom, you raised me to be all I can be for God, family, and ministry. Thank you, Dad, I never thought God would take you away so quickly but know that I cannot look back and wish anything was different. From the days of you teaching me how to shave with a school ruler to pulling out the best version of myself, it has been amazing. You taught me everything I know, and for your commitment to fatherhood and manhood in my life, I am grateful. You told me to reach for the top, and I did. This is for you, Dad. I miss you man! I miss you!

INTRODUCTION

Though sad to admit, good people who love God and serve his people suffer from hurts, pains, and offenses that leave them living in unforgiveness. Unforgiveness impedes progress in Christian ministry in the Kingdom. Those who call themselves children of God must remain blameless with God and others.

After years of hurt and misunderstanding, I had to come to this understanding. Unknowingly, unforgiveness had settled into my life, and I had mastered compensating for it instead of confronting it. Over time, I recovered from the ill effects and the life-changing grip unforgiveness had on my life. There is a principle theme throughout the word and work of Christ that is centered around forgiveness. The spiritual responsibility of those who are a part of the kingdom of God is primarily to love God, themselves, and each other. Unforgiveness impedes my fellowship with God and my fellowship with mankind. It caused me to be more to myself and not take part in ministry circumstances where trust felt like an issue. Even with family, unforgiveness will often fray the family bond.

The context is New Home AME Zion Church in York, South Carolina. Parishioners within the context are working in a contextual environment that has the remnants of past issues and unforgiveness. The project addressed how the reprehensible spirit of offense and unforgiveness hinders the local congregation's ability to live in reconciliation and community. This work illuminated similar issues found in my life and

that of the church. In my life, the residue of past hurts and instances of unforgiveness led to mental, emotional, and spiritual hindrances that became an issue in my personal growth and ministry progress. Within the life of the congregation, the infiltration of past hurts and unforgiveness has also hindered the congregational growth. The methodology was a six-week small group study of biblical examples and interdisciplinary constructs utilizing pre- and post-questionnaires, examination of scripture, teaching, discussion, and evaluation.

Chapter One introduces the ministry focus, which cross-sectioned the contextual analysis and my spiritual autobiography, synergizing the theme for this project. The points of intersection included the ill effects of unforgiveness.

Chapter Two explores the biblical foundation of this project. The story of Joseph is an appropriate biblical passage to serve as foundational to the needs of our ministry context. The story of Joseph speaks to the culmination of Joseph's journey from the place of hurt imposed upon him by his brothers to the place of healing given to him by God. The story of Joseph and his brothers is one of historical hurt, and it affects not only those who are victims but also those who are the victimizers. This chapter explores the fruitful outcome of forgiveness as it pertains to reconciling the divide in the community of God resulting from historical hurts and pains. Overcoming past hurts and pains through forgiveness leads to lasting reconciliation. Reconciliation would be meaningless without remorseful intent and a godly conviction. Joseph and his brothers give an example of reconciliation when undergirded by repentance and seeking and granting forgiveness.

Chapter Three probed a pivotal moment in history known as the Protestant Reformation, a protest by Christians in the century against the practices, traditions, and

dominant beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church. Martin Luther was excommunicated from the Catholic Church after his refusal to abnegate his ninety-five theses, which addressed issues of corruption in policy. The Protestant Reformation paved the way for church movements, such as Methodism. The Black Church Movement, influenced by slavery, originated from the Free African Society. The Free African Society influenced the movement that led to early African Methodism.

Chapter Four examines soteriology and its theological components and addresses the components of salvation. Soteriology explores man's escape from the grip of sin through the salvific work of Jesus Christ. Within the concept of soteriology, this chapter probes the nature of actual or original sin, deliverance from sin through atonement, forgiveness, repentance, and reconciliation. Since the original sin of man, humankind has needed deliverance from God. This deliverance is accomplished through atonement and salvation. Atonement addresses the process of redemption in the Old Testament, and salvation addresses the redemptive needs of mankind in the New Testament. In the process of salvation, this chapter lays out mankind's need for forgiveness, repentance, and reconciliation in relationship with God and others. Relational theology stands out for its perspective on God's interaction with creation. God is a relational God. He desires his people to be relational people.

Chapter Five explores therapeutic models of forgiveness and ways the reader can rid themselves of the mental and emotional anguish of unforgiveness. Unforgiveness overshadows the possibility of experiencing true inner peace. Mental and spiritual unrest is directly tied to one's ability to discover inner peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The concept of Social Psychology is fundamental to a successful group dynamic.

Psychology's study of social behavior is significant for many different reasons. It enables us to comprehend how societal expectations and norms influence individual behavior, how group dynamics affect judgments, and how interpersonal relationships impact mental and physical health. One's interactions, relationships, and group dynamics are shaped by social behavior, which is the bedrock of human society. All behavior that occurs in a social setting, considering interactions between people and groups, is referred to as social behavior in psychology**.** The interdisciplinary chapter captures how Social Psychology speaks to the behavior of those working together in community, and how forgiveness plays an intricate part of community. There are several models that influence the process of forgiveness from a therapeutic perspective that speaks to the factors of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Chapter Six outlines the project implementation process. It details the collection of data and its implementation and evaluation in a small group setting. Information gathered from the project implementation will be presented for possible instruction, evaluation, and replication in different contexts. The implementation of the project was based on the project proposal presented, whereas leadership would be strengthened. This project design consisted of a study of eight participants, all being active members of New Home AME Zion Church.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

My ministry interests are deeply rooted in my love for God and God's people. God has brought me through things that allowed me to help others. My time as a pastor and a mental health worker has always been surrounded by my love for people and looking out for their well-being. Caring for others is hard work and often takes a particular person. Caring for others has not always been easy, but God has given me a shepherd in the ministry and mental fields, usually known as the helping field. My professional development has centered on leading and loving people, from the military to mental health and ministry. In each area of my life, I have had to learn and relearn how to utilize these principles to develop the professional skills I need to be successful.

It has always been my desire to work in the helping field, whether it was in ministry or in the workplace. I have made ministry, educational, and career choices to help people in my mind and heart. In my desire to help people, God has given me a passion for supporting those dealing with behavior disorders, past hurts, and pains. In my career in mental health therapy, I learned a critical principle that allowed me to help my clients: finding the root cause of certain behaviors. Root causes are often complex when addressing behaviors or outcomes that affect the overall success of individuals and corporate environments. My background in mental health therapy taught me the value of root cause analysis to identify underlying issues that may not be presenting themselves in

the behavior but are causes of the problem itself. When determining the root cause of a thing, one will be able to deal with the matters affecting one's daily life often and adequately eliminate the issue. Upon my call to the ministry, I discovered a common problem among parishioners. Many behaviors that become roadblocks to church success stem from past hurts and pains suffered while serving. I have found that when people have a hard time working together as a community of believers, mistrust due to past hurts and unforgiveness are often at the root of the problems.

Context

New Home African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church is in a small South Carolina town called York. The ministry is considered a rural context serving the New Home Community of the town of York. New Home Church is a predominately African American congregation that would be regarded as a senior congregation based on the number of congregants over seventy years old. The church is steeped in the rich history of the African Methodist movement, which started for Zion with founding father James Varick. The tradition of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church is to increase our love for God and help meet humankind's needs by loving God wholeheartedly in soul and mind, with neighborly and brotherly love. New Home Church has based its theological emphasis on this principle and, since its inception, has built a solid family-oriented community known as the New Home community of York, South Carolina. The New Home community and the church were started in a bush harbor before its new beginnings in the new home and church. This church's rich history, spirit-filled, and led services

were known throughout South Carolina. South Carolina is a predominately rural state with beautiful landscape settings.

The New Home Church facility and parking area sit on two of the church's six acres. The church is located on the outskirts of York. The New Home Community is within a five-mile radius of the church. It is a rural area surrounded by trees with houses scattered about. The region is in what is known as the high country of South Carolina, which suggests that it is in the part of the state that is highest above sea level and located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountain range near King's Mountain, South Carolina. The community is an equal distance from Rock Hill, South Carolina, Gastonia, and Charlotte, North Carolina. Many of the members of the church live within three miles. The church has led this community with events like the Richard Mack Festival, political involvement in local town and county politics, and civil rights. We will also explore some challenges the church family has yet to resolve fully. New Home Church has faced church hurt from leadership, fellow congregants, and more profound issues of personality conflict, unforgiveness, and trusting leadership.

New Home AME Zion Church was initially started in 1897. A group began to meet at an old school named Black Diamond to have regular Sunday School meetings. As the congregation grew, the meeting moved to one of the members' homes, where prayer meetings and preaching were held each week. In 1897, the church fathers and pillars of the New Home community entered the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church denomination. According to official records, on October 1, 1900, the newly formed congregation purchased twenty-one and a half acres of land. The first church structure of the new land was a Brush Arbor, where many souls were saved, and many members were

added during the Pentecostal-like services. The second church was a wooden board structure that served as the pride and joy of the growing church and the entire community. Bible studies and services were held, and miracles began to happen in more significant numbers.

In 1927, a much larger church building was erected, and the church continued amalgamating the word of God into a growing community. New Home Church was known for its high-spirited worship experiences and hard-working collection of men who loved God and family. One of the oldest church members told of the many times the community came together for revival and church meetings, where the Spirit of God moved mightily. The New Home community is currently known for its powerful revivals. New Home has had many pastors throughout the years.

The church has had a host of pastors and trustees who made significant contributions to its journey. A. D. Davis, H.C. Meeks, and G. W. Dixon are credited as the church's founders. Rev. George Dixon was the first pastor. The accomplishments of Reverends S. S. Watson and E. Brown are mentioned for expanding the properties and adding to the church structure. One of the strongest pastoral figures mentioned by many is Reverend Dr. C. J. Jenkins. Dr. Jenkins pastored New Home twice in its rich history. Both times he was assigned to New Home Church, he was able to lead the church in building new facilities to accommodate its growth. When appointed the second, Dr. Jenkins was given credit for unifying the church family and making the current church building the “pride and joy” of the congregation. One of the significant accomplishments of members' leadership, such as W. L. Davis, H. C. Meeks, A. W. Williams, and others,

was the partnership with the Rosenwald Schools Project to bring a school to the New Home community.

The Rosenwald Schools Project was created in 1915 by Julius Rosenwald, the President of Sears and Roebuck. He set up a fund under his name to help build schools for communities in the South. From 1917 to 1932, his initiative supported the construction of more than five thousand school structures, significantly transforming the Southern areas. South Carolina alone saw the construction of five hundred buildings as part of this project. The New Home School was fortunate enough to receive this grant and build a school for the education of the members of the New Home community. Community members and the old Bethel School District administration purchased this school in partnership with the project. With the New Home church members' and leaders' hard work, dedication, and leadership, the school was built on a four-acre parcel adjacent to the New Home Church property. New Home Church purchased an additional two acres of land to provide space for the school project. New Home Church has a membership of two hundred and fifty-five congregants on the roll. The church has an active membership of approximately one hundred and fifty people. The membership of the church is ninety-eight percent African American.

The congregation is considered an older congregation with fourteen members over eighty years of age, forty members whose age ranges from sixty-five to seventy-nine years of age, thirty members with an age range of thirty to sixty-four years old, and sixteen young adults below the age of thirty. The senior population of New Home Church is a highly loving and encouraging group of people. They are godly proud of their accomplishments and encourage the younger leaders. The members of New Home

Church are very supportive of the seniors. Their love and support of the senior population is two-fold. Firstly, the senior's ministry supports the members of the church who are fifty-five and above through prayer, Bible study, and activities. Secondly, the church has the “Four-Score Plus” ministry. This ministry supports several members over eighty years of age. This ministry looks for opportunities to do activities and coordinate benevolence when needed. The leaders of this ministry are in close contact with the seniors and their families and are ready to serve them in any way they need. Overall, the seniors of New Home Church are very pleased with the efforts of the ministry leaders and are excited about the potential of the ministry going forward. New Home has one of the most prominent groups of active men I have pastored.

New Home Church has approximately fifty-five to sixty men working in the ministry or attending the church regularly. The men are extremely hard-working and are committed to ensuring that whatever is needed in church or community is done. The men’s ministry stands ready to assist other ministries within the church. The men also have a male choir that sings in several events around the community. The support the church receives from the men of the church is par excellent in comparison to other ministries I have pastored. The young males of the church often benefit from the presence of older men. Most of them are involved in mentoring programs and various youth ministries in the church.

New Home AME Zion Church is an excellent group of dedicated Christians proud of their history and traditions. They celebrate the place from whence they have come and look forward to what God has in store for them. It is a close-knit family church that is very proud of family achievements and activities. The families are enormous in this

church, and it seems they all have some tie to each other that had a lot to do with the start of the community they know as New Home. The church fathers moved there to start their families and comingled with each other, giving them ample, deep family ties. The church secretary informed me that she is a blood relative with three different families in the church. Being a family church helped this church get to where it is today. The AME Zion Church divides the churches into episcopal areas, conferences, and districts. New Home Church is the second church in the district and was the lead church at one point before the districts merged. The New Home Church is in the Rock Hill District in the South Carlina Conference of the South Atlantic Episcopal Area. The Rock Hill District comprises twenty-two churches in and around Rock Hill, South Carolina. The South Atlantic Episcopal Area is comprised of all the AME Zion Church in the states of South Carolina and Georgia. They have an understandably rich pride steeped in the southern Afro-American culture. Many things shape the church culture in this area. The south is known as the Bible Belt. Several churches had the exact origin that joined a church many black people attended and were buried in the cemetery of Allison Creek Presbyterian Church. Three black church congregations came out of Allison Creek, and New Home was one of them. They all settled in the same six- or seven-mile proximity and began to grow their communities in their divides. This historical fact certainly has impacted the church culture in the area. Many of the black members who left Allison Creek were blood relatives who formed subcultures that further divided them as family.

Some of New Home's strengths are embedded in its love for God, church, and community. The church has a great passion for the community. They work at a foodbank site each month and feed approximately one hundred and seventy-five families. The

community volunteer list is impressive to see. People from sister churches and other community leaders come together to serve the families greatly. People from various backgrounds and ethnicities come to the church to get their needs met. The united fellowship of those involved is quite refreshing. Another strength New Home has is leadership in the community. Several people in the church are involved in civic and political organizations. With such a presence in the community, New Home stands as a pillar of hope, help, and healing. The brotherhood fellowship of the church is also something unique and proves to be a strength of the church. Each church and the surrounding town have an active brotherhood fellowship that supports each other at community events. They have men's fellowship workshops and breakfasts. New Home Church certainly carries on the vision of the church's fathers and founders. New Home also has a robust senior population. Several members in their nineties still live with their church legacy and love God in heart, mind, and soul. In my view, the church is following the footsteps of the founders of Zion, who believed that they were called by God to lead people out of their struggles and to serve as His chosen people, spreading God's love to all. They aimed to spread the message of faith, help those in need, support those in captivity, assist the blind in seeing free those who are oppressed, and announce the coming of Christ until He returns.[1]

New Home Church is a rural family church steeped in the traditions and culture of the community's founders. They are kind-hearted, loving people who are proud of their past and share a hopeful future. They are vital in many areas, such as community, men's

[1] AME Zion General Conference Delegation, *Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church* (Charlotte, NC: Zion Publishing, 2016), 11.

civil and political presence. Though the church has much potential, it will not reach its fullest potential until it deals with past hurts and forgiveness from a sincere, humbled heart. They will significantly benefit from a loving approach to healing and handling church hurt, whether hurt by leadership, peers, or family. Some congregants may benefit from professional counseling to help them see their way through the perception of the hurt they have experienced. They could also benefit from the revelatory effectiveness of forgiveness and the power of releasing themselves into a world of inner peace. Knowing that hurt people hurt will bring enough conviction and correction to those who serve while suffering.

Leadership development is essential to the church, so members do not feel bullied or oppressed. Leaders need to be trained in general leadership skills, church polity, and building healthy and lasting Christian relationships. Leaders need to be taught the importance of accomplishing the mission through the power of the love of Christ. Those serving in leadership positions can reach levels they never knew when they regain the confidence of their faith and voice in God. Another vital part of leadership development is to know practical people skills. A great percentage of leadership in the church dynamic is dealing with people, whether individually or collectively. People skills are extremely important to the overall success of the leader-parishioner dynamic. I sincerely believe that if one does not know how to lead people, one will not get along with those whom one leads.

Ministry Journey

God has prepared me for this place in ministry throughout my entire life. My ministry has evolved through experiencing both trials and triumphs from childhood until now. Some of my ministry interests are deeply rooted in my ability to overcome personal hardships that I pridefully use as opportunities to help others. Ministry lessons have been implemented into my educational, professional, and ministry journey. After serving in the United States Army for more than fourteen years and being forced to accept a medical discharge, I was required to retrain into a civilian job of my choice. My careful selection of degree and career fields allowed me to choose areas in the helping field. I decided to go to school to study human growth and development, which ultimately led me to a career in mental health therapy. After finishing school in the early part of my journey, I began to work with children with behavior disorders. My professional career has always allowed me to help others. That is where my heart has rested in knowing my purpose in life. The joy of my call was firmly planted in the fact that God would forever use my life and ministry to help others overcome their current state of being and realize who God has called them to be.

The U.S. Army made me a strong man mentally and emotionally. While serving, I was placed in leadership positions that drove me to search within and find a way to accomplish the mission while displaying the highest form of discipline, teamwork, and care for others. The discipline I learned while serving has proven to be the foundation I needed to succeed in all I do. Having been taught the kind of discipline, I discovered while serving has helped me handle my life's problems through strength from within. I would not say I liked the Army initially, but I was encouraged to hang in there. I was

trained when physical discipline and hazing were still permitted during my tenure. In these times of punishment, I realized how to make myself live and succeed in teamwork. This is one of my favorite strengths because it has taught me how to work with others. It is my favorite because when I see the value in what others bring to a task is a joy because it allows working as an individual part of a collective process. Working with a team is essential in life, especially in ministry.

Training and working with a team are the key to a successful operation. One of the tenets of military leadership is building a sense of responsibility among subordinates. The team concept allows everyone to invest in the overall mission. My time as a pastor and a mental health worker has always surrounded my love for people and looking out for their well-being. Caring for others is hard work and often takes a particular person. Caring for others has not always been easy, but God has given me a shepherd in the ministry and mental fields, often known as the helping field. My professional development is centered on leading and loving people from the military to mental health and ministry. In each area of my life, I learned how to utilize these principles to develop the professional skills I need to be successful.

In my desire to help people, God has given me a passion for aiding those dealing with behavior disorders and past hurts and pains. In my career in mental health therapy, I learned a critical principle that allowed me to support my clients: finding the root cause of certain behaviors. Root causes are often complex when addressing behaviors or outcomes that affect the overall success of individual and corporate environments. My background in mental health therapy taught me the value of root cause analysis to identify underlying issues that may not be presenting themselves in the behavior but are

causes of the problem itself. When determining the root cause of a problem, one will be able to deal with the matters affecting one's daily life often and adequately eliminate the issue. Upon my call to the ministry, I discovered a common problem among parishioners. Many behaviors that become roadblocks to church success stem from past hurts and pains suffered while serving. I found that when people have a hard time working together as a community of believers, mistrust due to past hurts and unforgiveness are often at the root of the problems.

My desire to help God's people heal from their hurts and pains is a behavioral turning point stemming from my past hurts and pains. My behaviors as an adolescent went on a downward spiral, all arising from the betrayal of someone I trusted. As I grew from that moment, I remember feeling so bad about things that I began wondering why God would let such a thing happen. At that time in my life, I developed such a hatred and fear of being around men that I became friends and hung out with as many girls as I could. Because my self-esteem had plummeted, I needed to be the center of attraction in every aspect of life, even in class. I became the class clown and became disruptive and disrespectful to my teachers and classmates. My behavior became so bad that I was called to the principal's office several times, and several calls were made to my parents. I remember feeling like I did not care. This also affected my relationship with my dad because he was a strict disciplinarian, and I could not handle that dominant image. His response to almost anything was some punishment or a spanking. My father was not abusive to me at all. He just believed that sparing the rod spoils the child. I think my turn to alcohol at that time in my life was because of this very incident and my exposure to the alcoholic family culture I had experienced. I never knew at that time Satan had a very

different plan for my life, and I did not realize that I was following that plan. This moment in my life, the root cause of so many of my life's turning points, had been planted, and I never knew it was there. I went on from there to experience relationship problems, divorce, and so much more.

One of the greatest moments of my life was when God called me to minister to his people. It was then I found the road to inner peace and healing. Pastoring has been an incredible journey. I learned who God is through the experiences of so many of his saints. It seems to me that the call changes slightly during every conversation and prayer with one of God's children. Each time I took on caring for God's sheep, it meant something different to me. God began to cultivate, train, and position me to do my work in ministry. The call to help was so strong that when I received a medical discharge from the army and was being retrained for civilian life, I chose a college degree field and a secular job that followed my call. Most of my friends were doing something different than their call and pastoring on the side, but I felt that I should build my life around my call and work on the side. During the years early in my ministry, I suffered some of the losses mentioned. I learned that God will take care of you no matter what God's calling is without repentance.

One of my favorite scriptures is the story of the disciples caught in the storm when Jesus was asleep on the ship. In that story, God revealed to me that the disciples' amazement after Jesus spoke to the wind and the waves was not because Jesus was not always able to do that but because they never knew he could. God told me that every storm he allowed me to go through was designed to show me something I did not understand about God before the storm. I have used this for years to keep myself

grounded in the faith and excited about God. Because of the shame I felt from divorce and failure, I tried many times to hide from my responsibilities as a man of God, but each time the call found me. God brought me through times of great depression and gave me favor with my bishops and supervisors. God has blessed me with an incredible journey; I am eternally grateful.

Synergy

My ministry journey has led me to a desire to seek God and find inner peace so that I can properly heal from my past hurts and use those things that hurt me to help those around me. There was a time in my spiritual journey that I was at my lowest point. Day after day and night after night, I sat alone, feeling God would no longer use a failure like me. I could not find the strength or motivation to reappear to public life because the feeling of failure was so solid and heavy. A friend encouraged me to see a counselor. It was then that I learned I was borderline clinically depressed. I spent so much time trying to pray, sing, and praise my way out of that hole. Spiritually, it was the hardest thing I ever had to go through. Being divorced and feeling like a failure while still being pulled upon as a leader was incredibly draining. Self-condemnation was beginning to get the best of me; and I felt like I was in a pit.

One night, God led me to the story of the prodigal son. After much riotous living, the son found himself at the lowest point, the hog pen. The story had five words that changed my perspective on life, love, and liberty in the Lord. Those words were, “But when he came to himself” (Lk. 15:17). In that story, I found the new hope and healing that I needed to return to what I loved, and that was doing the work of God. Like the son

had decided to pull himself out of the mud of his life, I decided to do the same. God blessed me so much after that moment that I began to experience new things in God. During one of my counseling sessions, I learned how to identify the root causes of my behaviors. This was important to my journey because there was no clear path to my healing and recovery unless I somehow remembered the source of my hurts and pains. My therapist helped me to identify the fact that the root cause of my turning points in life was the unfortunate act I suffered as an adolescent. Unbeknownst to me, mistrust and unforgiveness were critical roadblocks to my healing and inner peace.

I discovered a similar pattern of mistrust and unforgiveness in my ministry context due to past hurts and pains. Family units play a significant role in the makeup of this congregation, and distrust and division between these families are evident in their interactions. The division was etched into the culture. Through the years, families have protected themselves from harm from outsiders, producing the current-day family bond. Although the families have grown together and have formed tight bonds, the church has become somewhat clannish in its dealings with others. The significant family ties are very encouraging; however, in some cases, the families have subdivided themselves and distinguished themselves so that they seem like separate congregations within one another. As the family units move among each other, it seems there is mistrust within the church family. My assignment to New Home is four years old, and the distrust and hurt they have experienced makes it extremely difficult to influence some to take on new feats of leadership. New Home has strong personalities that intimidate those afraid to step up and take on new tasks. Some church members have even stepped down from specific functions due to the depth of the family ties and how difficult that makes progress.

In New Home, mistrust seems to stem from two very distinct factors. Firstly, church hurt imposed by leaders and other members is a common hindrance. Some of the leaders in the past have been engaged with profound issues that have caused deep hurt. Many things have been cited as examples of church hurt, such as quarreling, family systems, positioning, and abuse from pastoral leadership. The itinerant ministry has also been a factor in some of the hurt or mistrust within the church. The itinerate or traveling preacher form assignment in the AME Zion Church makes it often possible or necessary to assign pastors to different churches within the connection as often as an annual basis. As is common among several AME Zion congregations, the congregants do not trust the new leadership because they either worked well with the previous administration and regret their reassignment or do not attach themselves to it for fear of building a relationship that may not last long. It is usually common for congregations to take a few years to attach to a newly assigned preacher for fear of losing them sooner. New Home had two pastors before me who came behind the second appointment of Rev. C. J. Jenkins' second pastoral appointment and the successful accomplishment of building the church building we are currently using. Rev. Jenkins was a hero to the people in this church and community. The pastors following him would have to build the same kind of trust and appreciation with the people as they expected. Both pastors preceding my appointment had their struggles post-Dr. Jenkins. There have been significant disagreements and misunderstandings, which hindered a trusting environment between pastors and congregants. Over the years, the church has had trouble handling past hurts and walking in forgiveness. Some members want to return to the church but with great hesitancy due to past occurrences of pain.

Another weakness of the church is untrained leadership and their voiceless approach to duty. It appears most of the people in the office do not want to exercise the call and purpose of their office because of how they project the response of others. They are afraid to lead in hopes others are not inconvenienced or angered in the process. Vision implementation is complex because the pastor does most of the things needed to progress. God has blessed me over the years to be in various leadership positions that I believe New Home can benefit from in many ways. My professional career has always been one that allowed me to help others. That is where my heart has rested in knowing my purpose in life. My present professional strengths are best described in three ways. The U.S. Army made me a strong man mentally and emotionally. While serving, I was placed in leadership positions that forced me to search within and find a way to accomplish the mission while displaying the highest form of discipline, teamwork, and care for others. The discipline I learned while serving has proven to be the foundation I needed to succeed in all I do. Having been taught the kind of discipline I learned while serving has helped me handle my life's problems with strength from within. I did not like the Army at first, but I was encouraged to hang in there. During my tenure, I was trained during a time when physical discipline and hazing were still permitted. It was in the times of punishment I realized how to make myself live and succeed. The second discipline is teamwork. This is one of my favorite strengths because it has taught me how to work with others. Seeing the value in what others bring to a task is a joy because it allows working as an individual part of a collective process. Working with a team is essential in life, especially in ministry. Training and working with a team are what I feel are the key to a successful operation. One of the tenets of military leadership is building a sense of

responsibility among subordinates. The team concept allows everyone to invest in the overall mission. The third discipline is caring for others. My love for people has always surrounded my time as a pastor and a mental health worker, looking out for their well-being. Caring for others is hard work and often takes a particular person. Caring for others has not always been easy, but God has given me a shepherd in the ministry and mental fields, often known as the helping field. My professional development has centered on leading and loving people from the military to mental health, then to ministry. In each area of my life, I had to learn and relearn how to utilize these principles to develop the professional skills I need to be successful.

In this ministry project, I desire to develop a leadership model to help parishioners discover inner peace from past hurts and pains through forgiveness. Finding inner peace from issues that stemmed from years of hurt and unforgiveness will be critical to the forward movement and progress of the congregation. My ministry skills and interests will be able to help the parishioners in this project. My spiritual and ministry journey has taught me the value of inner peace and forgiveness. I had to forgive family members and church members alike. Once my father died, I discovered I had some underlying issues of forgiveness when dealing with a particular church leader who offended my father in the days preceding his death. When evaluating my potential in the church's future, having inner peace and walking in the freedom to forgive will ultimately release me to a broader ministry level. The same is true with God's people. For those who find themselves dealing with the awful reality of how owning their hurts and not releasing them to God can significantly stunt spiritual growth and ministry advancement. The members of my ministry context will greatly benefit from lessons from my journey of seeking inner peace

through prayer and learning to forgive genuinely. Secondly, once my issues of unforgiveness were revealed to me, I heard the voice of God saying, “You cannot be elevated to certain levels in the church until you forgive the church.” I interpreted that to mean my ministry would plateau if I did not learn to forgive. In doing so, I believe this message stands true among the members of my ministry context. New Home Church can be a pillar in the community in ways they do not realize, but past issues have impeded the flow of their overall ministry ability. Unforgiveness has become a wedge between people who have once been close. My journey and that of New Home Church have suffered from the ill effects of unforgiveness and have, in some ways, brought our quest to go higher and develop a more profound relationship with God to a stalemate. I believe it is the will of God that this spiritual impediment be brought to light, and those who walk with me in this ministry should agree that God desires us to be in love and at peace with one another. God is a relational God who desires his creation to love in such a way that offense must release its grip and God’s children be free to walk in unity and strength.

In my project, I will seek to help the people in my ministry context identify issues of past hurts and pains and show them how to release those pains into the hands of God in exchange for inner peace and forgiveness. In teaching the power of forgiveness, my context will learn that holding on to unforgiveness keeps their wounds open and does not allow forward mobility in life and God. Leading God’s people beyond the pains of the past to a place to be willing and open to the process of forgiveness will strengthen individual confidence and relationships with others. I want to explore ways to inspire growth by forgiving oneself and others through prayer, daily affirmations, and faith in the God of peace. I seek to show those who have been hurt by the actions of others how to

properly engage in the process of forgiveness by learning what forgiveness is and what it is not. Forgiveness as a process and not an event is a more effective way to deal with hurt. My greatest desire is to show others how to embrace and properly process their transgressions and those of others. Those who understand the awesome task of managing how they feel about the actions of others or assuming responsibility and accountability for the actions they take against others will draw nearer to the peace God requires of God's creation. I pray that God's people learn the value of turning human error into a divine experience. "To Err is Human; To Forgive is Divine."[2]

[2] Alexander Pope, "Essay on Criticism Part II," Poetry Foundation, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44897/an-essay-on-criticism-part-2.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

As senior pastor of a growing rural congregation, I have witnessed many things that are considered blessings to God's kingdom by such great people. I have also witnessed that can further or hinder church mission and ministry. Unity among parishioners is imperative to the successful accomplishment of ministry objectives. When conflict arises among those called to walk in harmony, it presents various underlying factors that may impede the successful flow of congregational growth. One of the greatest hindrances that prove to be a hindrance to almost every aspect of ministry is unforgiveness. Unforgiveness is a spiritual stronghold that leaves its victims fighting bitterness from past hurts and offenses. When one is offended or hurt, it is natural to be angry. Refusing to forgive hinders our freedom in Christ. It stunts our spiritual growth and stops our prayers from getting answered. Bitterness against others and nursing past hurts, and wrongs contribute to servants of God not walking in the fullness of unity or reconciliation.

The story of Joseph is an appropriate biblical passage to serve as foundational to the needs of our ministry context. The story of Joseph speaks to the culmination of Joseph's journey from the place of hurt imposed upon him by his brothers to the place of healing given to him by God. The story of Joseph and his brothers is one of historical hurt and its effect not only on those who are victims but also on those who are the victimizers.

Joseph was the last patriarch in the Patriarchal Period. His experience getting to the place God planned for him reflects the journey several people in my ministry are currently experiencing. This passage speaks to the problem of unforgiveness embedded in the church.

I will examine and engage this text in exploring the importance of relationships, repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The story of Jacob in Genesis 50:15-21 reveals the relationship between reconciliation, repentance, and forgiveness. Joseph had gotten past the hurt and pain caused by his brothers; however, they needed the opportunity to repent. The humility of his brothers gained forgiveness from Joseph. It freed them from fearing what Joseph would do to them in retaliation. Until this point, Joseph's brothers had a different opinion about his feelings about the “crime” they had committed against him. Trusting the process of forgiveness is hard for many people. It is often approached in fear of the response of those they offended. Joseph assumed his proper place in God, which was the reason for his peace. His ultimate reconciliation with his brothers hinged on him standing right before God. Joseph wept when approached by his brothers, which showed how tender his heart was towards them. He reassured his brothers by asking them, "Am I in God's place?” (50:19)

Joseph had the power and authority to imprison or even execute his brothers. However, he did not exercise this power arrogantly, recognizing that God had the ultimate judgment. By submitting to God's will, Joseph helped his brothers understand God's plan even after they had wronged him. This led to a heartwarming reconciliation within their family.

This biblical foundation chapter will explore the exegetical content in the Old Testament Book of Genesis 50:15-22. This story presents the importance of the relationship between repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Through forgiveness, Joseph and his brothers find peace among them, leading them to reconciliation and life together until Joseph's death. If founded upon repentance and forgiveness, reconciliation will produce a strong bond of reconciliation; however, it will be short-lived and meaningless if not. Once Joseph saw his brother's repentance, he forgave them and reconciled with them. Reconciliation in this family opened the way for growth and prosperity in Israel. This story teaches us that repentance and forgiveness are necessary for reconciliation. God's desire for his people to be a loving community is indicated in this story, which leads us to grant forgiveness when offended and seek it when we are the offender.

Joseph was reconciled with his brother after they sought forgiveness for the crime they had committed against him (v. 16-17). Their repentance led to their finding inner peace and reconciliation with their brother. Personal interactions require a continuous, intentional space of repentance and forgiveness. Seeking and granting forgiveness opens the opportunity for reconciliation. The relationship between forgiveness and repentance is imperative to the lasting family bond of Joseph and his brothers.

This chapter will explore the fruitful outcome of forgiveness as it pertains to reconciling the divide in the community of God resulting from historical hurts and pains. Overcoming past hurts and pains through forgiveness leads to lasting reconciliation. Reconciliation would be meaningless without remorseful intent and a godly conviction.

Joseph and his brothers give an example of reconciliation when undergirded by repentance and seeking and granting forgiveness.

Joseph and his brothers were able to show the world the power of reconciliation; as a result, other families in Israel could relocate to Egypt as well, resulting in protection from the famine. These families were able to flourish in Egypt, which was the fulfillment of God's promise to their forefathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The story of this family and the journey of past hurts and pains, the death of their father, and their ability to overcome provide powerful examples of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

The primary principle that has guided the overall experience and positive outcomes of the Christian journey for many congregants has centered around faith in God and unity among the children of God. Considering this, the scripture relevant to the context of this chapter is the Old Testament passage Genesis 50:15-21, which reads:

> Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?" So, they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died; say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you. Therefore, please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also wept, fell before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves." But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to harm me, God intended it for good, to preserve numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." In this way, he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.[1]

This scriptural text was chosen because it explores the themes of forgiveness and reconciliation through the life of a family faced with deep division. It exemplifies how indignation can lead to deception and division, even among family members. As a result

[1] Biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard of the Bible, unless otherwise noted, Genesis 50:15-21.

of jealousy among these brothers, Joseph experienced hardship he did not ask for but ultimately appreciated. Joseph's response to his brothers' nearly evil tactics shows the reader the true power of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Historical Context

This text is the last major division of Genesis and focuses on Joseph's story and their journey to reconciliation. Speiser tells us it is "the most intricately constructed and the best integrated of all the patriarchal histories and how the narrative is unsurpassed in the whole Pentateuch."[2] According to Longman and Dillard, in their book, *An Introduction to the Old Testament,* the Hebrew phrase (Heb. b e re *ƒ* Êi t) fits the book of Genesis because it is the book of origins or beginnings.[3] Longman and Dillard tell us that the Book of Genesis is foundational in the Torah, the first five books of the Bible.[4] Genesis covers the creation story of Abraham and the four generations following what Longman and Dillard call "the family of promise" on their journey from Mesopotamia to the promised land.[5] The Torah is also known as the Pentateuch because of the post-Mosaic narrative of the death of Moses in Deuteronomy chapter thirty-four, many scholars give authorship credit for the Book of Genesis to Moses.[6]

---

[2] E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: The Anchor Bible Genesis Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1964), 294.

[3] Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 38.

[4] Longman and Dillard, *Introduction to Old Testament*, 38.

[5] Longman and Dillard, *Introduction to Old Testament*, 38.

[6] Longman and Dillard, *Introduction to Old Testament*, 41.

This story is filled with past hurts, pains, and family betrayal, yet with love, forgiveness, and reconciliation. This text is a narrative that culminates in the reconciliation of Joseph and his brothers just after the death and burial of their father, Jacob. Joseph was the final figure of the patriarchal period. Chiel further contributes that the transformation of God's relationship with the Jews is the central theme of this story. He says that rather than have an individual relationship with certain Patriarchs, God built a relationship with the nation of Israel, Jacob's sons, and everyone that came from them. Chiel suggests that Joseph's traumatic journey with his brothers' jealous indignation could have started before his birth. Joseph's father, Jacob, was on the run after deceiving his brother Esau and worked hard to marry Laban's daughter, Rachel.[7]

The story of Joesph takes place between chapters thirty-seven and fifty of the Book of Genesis in what Mark G. Brett calls in his book, *Genesis: Procreation and Politics of Identity*, "*Reasons of State*."[8] According to Brett, the beginning of Joseph's story goes straight to the heart of the genealogical tensions set up in the previous chapters. Although Joseph assisted Jacob's two wives Zilpah and Bilhuh, Jacob still regarded Joseph as a favored son and gave him a treasured coat as a sign of his paternal favor. Brett brings to light that Joseph's brothers were so upset because of the dreams he had and Jacob's view of his favorite son by his favorite wife. The only other brother of Joseph born to Rachel is Benjamin. The indignant brothers are seen as what Brett called

---

[7] Hillel J. Chiel, "Joseph, The Master of Dreams," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 39, no. 1 (2005): 5.

[8] Mark G. Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity, Old Testament Readings* (London, UK: Routledge, 2000), vii.

"the sons of the secondary wives" and are the ones who are resentful and unable to speak peaceably to Joseph.[9]

Literary Context

Genesis is divided into two parts. The first part (Genesis 1-11) describes the origin of the creation, Adam, and his sin. Part one of Genesis is broken down into the source of all things and the origin of man.

Part 1: The Origin or Beginning of Mankind

a) Introduction and Creation—1:1-2:3
b) The Account of the Heavens and the Earth—2:4-4:26
c) The Account of Adam—5:1-6:8
d) The Account of Noah—6:9-9:28
e) The Account of Shem, Ham, and Japheth—10:1-11:9
f) The Account of Shem (chosen)—11:10-26[10]

According to Kaiser, in his book, *"The Literary Form of Genesis 1–11," in New Perspectives on the Old Testament*, the opening chapters of Genesis are equally vulnerable and exposed to the critical eye of researchers and scholars as Genesis chapters twelve through fifty. He points out the writer's intent of part one of Genesis as more descriptive than historical. Kaiser also points out how the writer describes "sixty-four geographical terms, eighty-eight personal names, forty-eight generic names, and at least

[9] Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and Politics of Identity*, 109.

[10] Walter Kaiser, "The Literary Form of Genesis 1–11," in *New Perspectives on the Old Testament*, ed. J. Barton Payne (Waco, TX: Word, 1970), 59.

twenty-one identifiable cultural items in these opening chapters of the book of Genesis to document history and not as much lineage."[11]

Part two (Genesis 12-50) accounts for Abraham's patriarchal history to Jacob's son Joseph.

Part 2: The Patriarchal History

a) The Account of Terah (Abraham)—11:27-25:11
b) The Account of Ishmael (not chosen) —25:12-18
c) The Account of Isaac (chosen)—25:19-35:29
d) The Account of Esau (not chosen)—36:1-43
e) The Account of Jacob (chosen)—37:2-50:26[12]

The story of Joseph has been one of literary concern since the day he was born. Levenson tells us Joseph's conception, birth, and naming signal a unique character's arrival. He further explains that Rachel is described in scripture as an "akhirah," adequately translated as "barren woman," but more whimsically rendered as "a woman who eventually gives birth to a baby boy."[13] Rachel and Leah suffer years of sibling rivalry because Jacob loved Rachal more than Leah. Yet, Leah bore him a son named Reuben, while Rachel was deemed barren. This caused much resentment between the sisters. Rachel was the love of Jacob's eye, yet she could not conceive. Leah, who was not physically appealing to Jacob, bore a son named Reuben.

While processing and dealing with her bareness, Rachel conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my disgrace" (Gen. 30:23). She named her son Joseph,

---

[11] Kaiser, "The Literary Form of Genesis," 59-60.

[12] Kaiser, "The Literary Form of Genesis," 60.

[13] Alan T. Levenson, "Joseph: Favored Son, Hated Brother," in *Joseph: Portraits Through the Ages* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 2.

stating, "May the Lord add another son for me" (Gen. 30:22-24). Rachel produces a boy and, as it were, double-names him.[14] The broader focus in this narrative is whether Joseph, born of Jacobs's favorite of the two wives, is considered the firstborn. Jacob first thought Joseph would take the lead. Reuben's efforts to lead were unsuccessful. In his blessings to his children, Joseph appoints Judah as the leader among his brothers. Joseph's dreams play a role in unraveling the story as they center around the leadership within the community of Israel. Initially, Joseph's brothers misinterpreted his dreams, believing that he would rise to power and rule over them. This misinterpretation sparked conflict, provoking his brothers to sell him in an attempt to strip him of the authority their father had foreseen for him. When Joseph reunited with his brothers in Egypt, he realized that his dream was more about his duty to look after his brothers and the people of Israel than focusing on gaining fame for himself.[15]

Chiel dissects the importance of dreams in Joseph's journey. Joseph initially experienced the pain his brothers inflicted upon him after they became angry about the dreams; he shared that he believed God gave them to him when he shared them with his family (Gen. 37:5-8). Although his brothers hated him due to misperceptions concerning his dream, Chiel explains how Joseph's dream was bound to come true because it came from God. His brothers came and bowed to him as they looked for food.[16]

The sheaf in Joseph's dream, his brother's search for food, and the fact that they bow to him is revealing of God's intent in Joseph's journey. In his dream, Joseph's

---

[14] Levenson, "Joseph: Favored Son, Hated Brother," 7.

[15] Chiel, "Joseph, The Master of Dreams," 7.

[16] Chiel, "Joseph, The Master of Dreams," 10.

brothers bow down to him in the form of a sheaf. They bowed down to him, looking for food, which confirmed the sheaf of wheat in his dreams. Joseph was the one in charge of providing, which is why his bundle stood out in the center. Additionally, his true identity remained hidden from everyone. As a result, the bundles ended up bowing down to his bundle since he served as the food provider for his brothers. Chiel says that Joseph's hidden identity shifted his position and purpose from power over his brothers to responsibility to feed them as an "Egyptian official in charge of food, which accounts for the absurd image of sheaves bowing to a sheaf."[17]

Joseph's future agony carries much meaning because his brothers hate him for being their father's most beloved son, to whom he gave a coat or tunic of many colors. The coat of favoritism, along with the vague repeating of his dreams, resulted in a place of anger by his brothers, which caused them to throw him into a pit, sell him to Gypsy traders, and tell their father lies as an act to cover up their hatred and negligence. Jacob's pain began from pain that runs within families. Levenson discusses some material immediately before Joseph's story concerning Jacob and his wives, resulting in two important aspects found in Joseph's story: Jacob's favoritism and brothers' hatred. "Caught between his doting father and envious siblings," says The Jewish Study Bible about Joseph."[18]

The text chosen for this foundational chapter is neatly tucked between two significant life events as they knew them. The death of their father, Jacob, and the death and burial of Joseph himself were those two events. The death and burial of Jacob are

---

[17] Chiel, "Joseph, The Master of Dreams," 11.

[18] Levenson, "Joseph: Favored Son, Hated Brother," 9.

significant in the process of forgiveness and reconciliation for Joseph and his brothers. The story of Jacob's death begins in Genesis chapter forty-nine. Jacob calls his sons together to tell them what will happen in the days to come (Gen. 49:1). Jacob starts to prepare for his death in chapters forty-eight and forty-nine. In his planning, he instructs his son Joseph on where to bury him. Just before he dies, Jacob calls his sons together.

He blesses them with suitable parting words specific to each son. Jacob blesses Joseph with the "blessings of your father," which are "stronger than the blessings of the eternal mountains" (Gen. 49:26). In Jacob's case, Erich Auerbach may be understating Joseph as a biblical character when he writes, "But what a road, what a fate, lies between the Jacob who cheated his father out of his blessing and the old man whose favorite son has been torn to pieces by a wild beast!"[19] After seventeen years, Jacob realizes Joseph had not been killed in the wild but was alive and responsible for food distribution in Egypt. It did not matter to him that he had adopted Ephraim and Manasseh; Jacob still addressed his son in his final family meeting.[20]

> Then he charged them, saying to them, "I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my ancestors—in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave in the field at Machpelah, near Mamre, in the land of Canaan, in the field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite as a burial site. There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried; there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried; and there I buried Leah— the field and the cave in it were purchased from the Hittites." When Jacob ended his charge to his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed, breathed his last, and was gathered to his people (Gen. 49:29–33).

Jacob's calling his sons together was significant to their reconciliation. His death proved to be a vital part of the unification he desired to see in his sons. In Genesis chapter

---

[19] Levenson, “Deaths and Burials of Jacob and Joseph,” 195.

[20] Levenson, “Deaths and Burials of Jacob and Joseph,” 195.

forty-nine, Jacob gives his sons their set of instructions, marking a significant moment in their relationship, first addressing them as "the tribes of Israel."[21] He desired to be buried in the land of Cannon in his ancestral burial ground where his fathers were buried. Jacob sends his sons to talk to their brother. Out of respect and honor of their father's desire, they journey to see Joseph, which marks the start of their forgiveness and reconciliation.

Textual Analysis

Genesis chapter fifty begins with Joseph flinging himself on his father as he weeps over him and kisses him. Levenson says this is the only case in scripture where one Bible character falls on the face of another, though, as Levenson states, it may be an acknowledgment that Jacob lies in bed.[22] His brothers are not mentioned when Joseph mourns his father's death. Joseph mourns for his father profoundly. Jacob had now put things in their proper order. Jacob had a message for each of his sons, and Joseph now takes the place his father told him of in Genesis chapter forty-nine. Without question or consultation, Joseph ordered his father to be embalmed and prepared for the burial he asked for in his departing dialogue (Gen. 50:1-2).

Levenson discusses the contrast between Jewish burial practices that emphasize quick interment in basic linen shrouds and the discomfort felt by commentators regarding Jacob's embalming process.[23] Jacob's body was transported slowly from Egypt to the tombs in Canaan, a process that would have been made easier for the authors if

---

[21] Levenson, "Deaths and Burials of Jacob and Joseph," 196.

[22] Levenson, "Deaths and Burials of Jacob and Joseph," 197.

[23] Levenson, "Deaths and Burials of Jacob and Joseph," 197.

mummification or embalming had been involved. Nevertheless, ancient Israelite customs also allowed for the transportation of bodies like Rachel's.[24]

Levenson writes that there was a debate among the rabbis regarding whether Joseph should have embalmed his father. Judah thought that by violating the law in such a way, Joseph may have shortened his own life. On the other hand, some rabbis commended Joseph for fulfilling his promise to bury Jacob in Canaan promptly while waiting for Jacob's passing.[25] The Egyptians had such consideration for Joseph and his family when Jacob passed that they wept with them for forty days and lamented for thirty additional days. Joseph's burial, however, is a different consideration. Rachels's burial site is located in the land of Benjamin, not at Machpelah. The reason for this is believed to be that Benjamin was the territory of Joseph's brother, where Rachel passed away during childbirth. Interestingly, Joseph himself is not interred in the family tomb at Machpelah but rather in Shechem, a plot of land that Jacob had acquired from the descendants of Hamor, Shechems father (Jos. 24:32). Cox elaborates on how anthropologists depict the initial three gene lineage are the Abraham lineage as a genealogy. This genealogy traces descent unilaterally through a chain of exclusions.[26] Regarding Joseph, the genealogical structure in Genesis changes from a linear genealogy to a segmented genealogy, which, according to Cox, is “a genealogy that traces more than one line of descent from a common ancestor.”[27]

---

[24] Benjamin D. Cox and Susan Ackerman, “Rachel’s Tomb,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 1 (2009): 137.

[25] Levenson, “Deaths and Burials of Jacob and Joseph,” 199.

[26] Cox and Ackerman, “Rachel’s Tomb,” 138.

[27] Cox and Ackerman, “Rachel’s Tomb,” 139.

Jacob purchased the land of Shechem from the sons of Hamor. It later became an inheritance for Joseph's descendants (Jos. 24:32). Similar to how Abraham designated Machpelah as a place for his family (Gen. 23:20), Shechem is now recognized as a location for Joseph's ancestors.[28] Joseph makes the Israelites swear to bring his bones from Egypt to Canaan. “When God has taken notice of you, you shall carry up my bones from here" (Gen. 50:25). Joseph was buried in Shechem, described in Joshua as "the piece of ground which Jacob has bought for a hundred kesitas from the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, and which had become a heritage of the Josephites."[29]

Forgiveness is essential to finding peace and reconciliation between the brothers. In Genesis 50:15-21, we see the foundational basis for forgiveness and reconciliation. Joseph and his brothers have been through a lot with the passing of their father, Jacob. For years, the family had been divided because of a dream Joseph had and how his brothers misinterpreted it. Joseph suffered many things at the hands of his brother, who was under the influence of great anger. In this text, Joseph reemphasized his position in God and taught his brothers the complexity and the necessity of repentance in forgiveness, which brings peace and ultimate reconciliation.

Joseph reiterates his promise to his brothers in Genesis 45:1-8, in which he tells them not to be afraid or in reproach and that he will take care of them. In chapter fifty, Joseph and his brothers are now together for the first time, and their father has died. The brothers were haunted by the memory of their wrongdoing, towards their brother feeling exposed without their father’s protection. They feared Joseph might seek retribution.

---

[28] Cox and Ackerman, “Rachel’s Tomb,” 140.

[29] Cox and Ackerman, “Rachel’s Tomb,” 140.

According to McFadyen guilt weighed heavily on them. Of approaching Joseph to ask for forgiveness, they opted to send a message tactfully reminding him of their shared devotion to a common God and appealing to his respect for his father's wishes.[30]

Forgiveness requires repentance. Joseph was moved to tears by the awful spell that their old sin had cast over his brothers' lives. "Oh! How dreadful is a guilty conscience? It will cause our sins to haunt us years after they have been committed."[31] We often suppress the past so that it seems to no longer exist. Repentance is an acknowledgment of wrongdoing and one's desire to fix it, as Joseph's brother did.

On the contrary, McFadyen tells us that the past may be buried but not dead. He explains how Joseph's brother had done everything malicious and ingenuine people do to another person; in this case, they sold him as an enslaved person, threw him into an empty well, and left him to his fate.[32] These brothers felt they were done with Joseph and perhaps congratulated themselves on getting rid of their brother Joseph; however, the past has a way of reappearing, which can haunt those who have committed a wrong.[33]

Joseph's brothers may have thought they had eluded the haunting facts of their past dealings with their brother Joseph. However, according to McFadyen, their past was not dead; it was only buried. Once these brothers found themselves facing what they thought was the wrath of their brother, who was now second in command over Egypt, McFayden says their past leaped out of its grave with a sad, awful terror.[34] It is truly

---

[30] John E. McFadyen, "Expository Studies in the Old Testament: IV. Joseph," *The Biblical World* 29, no. 4 (1907): 302.

[31] Lee, Hatchard, Hazard, Howard, and Evans, "The Story of Joseph and His Brethren," 1811.

[32] McFadyen, "Expository Studies in the Old Testament," 303.

[33] McFayden, "Expository Studies in the Old Testament," 303.

amazing when God fulfills his plans. Sometimes, God turns our methods to overcome obstacles into tools for achieving His goals.[35] The fact that they categorized their offense against their brother as a "crime" (v. 17) proves how haunting their past had on them. Any remorse they may have felt may seem to have had less sting over the years, but now that they are facing the one they wronged, their past seems to have presented itself as though it had never left. They had already reasoned one to another, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore, behold also, his blood is required of us" (Gen. 42:22). The commission of a crime leaves those sorrowful feeling guilty even after years have passed. The word crime in (v. 17) is translated from the Hebrew word פֶּשַׁע (*pĕ·šă ʿ*), which means to commit a sin or transgression.[36] The brother's criminal intent was an act of what Swanson defines as rebellion or revolt, which by definition, signifies an act to rise up in clear defiance of authority.[37] This word crime also means transgression. According to Brown, Driver, and Brigs, transgression translates in three different ways: a transgression is an offense committed against an individual, a nation, or God.[38] Jospeh's brothers were begging him to forgive them of their sins and offenses committed in rebellion with God's authority in Joseph's life. They had not only transgressed against Joseph but also against

---

[34] McFayden, "Expository Studies in the Old Testament," 303.

[35] McFayden, "Expository Studies in the Old Testament," 22.

[36] James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew Old Testament* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

[37] Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains*.

[38] Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1977), 833.

God. A transgression is "what is contrary to a standard, human or divine, with a focus on the rebellious nature of the sin as in Gen 50:17."[39] The brothers were guilty of a crime because they violated God's intentions for family and brotherhood.

Joseph's brothers, having been haunted by the thought of his blood being required of them, may have thought that whatever happened to them over the years was a judgment of God. Unlike Joseph's brothers, sin does not always prick a person's heart; some people are hardened by their crimes against others, never accepting true repentance.[40]

Joseph's reassuring temperament towards his brothers is a driving force in understanding the power one has over one's reaction to what has been done to them. Joseph heard the fear and trembling in their plea and wept, reminding them not to be afraid and that he had forgiven and would take care of them. Rabbi Barry L Schwartz, in his book, *The Path of the Prophets,* gives insight into the path to forgiveness Joseph had to take. Schwartz tells us that Joseph is a hero, a child of the prophets, because he embodies the value of forgiveness. He says this is the first explicit instance of repentance and forgiveness in the Torah in that Judah's remorse moves Joseph to see the larger context of God's plan by letting go of the past and embracing the place where he currently stands and at some point, Joseph becomes convinced that his fall, rise, suffering, and triumph are God's plans.[41] As we look closer at this family's journey to reconciliation, we notice Joseph's response to his brother's plea. Joseph's ability to forgive

---

[39] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 833.

[40] McFayden, "Expository Studies in the Old Testament," 23.

[41] Barry L. Schwartz, "Joseph's Cry: The Path of Forgiveness," in *Path of the Prophets: The Ethics-Driven Life* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 99.

his brothers rested in his confidence in God's plan. His faith in God assured him that God was with him, and he planned to use what his brothers did to him for his excellent and ultimate arrival to that place God had prepared for him. Instead of assuming the position of God, Joseph gladly accepted his place in God. Upon receiving their message, Joseph was moved to tears and felt mixed emotions, including sadness at their repentance and frustration at their misinterpretation of his kind and giving character.

After he received their message, they decided to come in person. Once there, they lay prostrate before him (vs. 18). This action fulfilled the same dream that had caused his brother's actions years before. Joseph answers them, "Fear not, for am I in place of God?" (v. 19). It was not for Joseph to get revenge, as he reaffirms his faith in God and God's sovereignty, promising to care for them and their children. Joseph responded in terms that Schwartz calls "the big picture."[42] Joseph comforts his brother by telling them not to fear because it is not his heart to seek revenge. He assures them, "Besides, although you intended me harm, God intended it for good. And so, fear not. I will sustain you and your children" (Gen. 50:20). Schwartz also points out that some biblical commentators share the brothers' doubt of Joseph in that his theological understanding is that God forgives and that what the brothers did to him was a part of God's overall plan for his life.[43]

McGill University Library shares that Joseph believed it was important to align himself with God's perspective rather than dwell on the wrongs done to him. He saw his position and purpose stemming from his brother's mistakes and animosity. Joseph emphasized the nature of forgiveness, attributing his journey's outcome to God's

---

[42] Schwartz, *The Path of Forgiveness*, 99.

[43] Schwartz, *The path of Forgiveness*, 100.

influence. He acknowledged God's hand in guiding him and expressed gratitude for providence. In his demeanor toward his brothers, Joseph displayed no bitterness, resentment, or desire for retaliation despite their harm toward him. Instead, he became a source of solace for those who had wronged him."[44]

The authors of a book called *Joseph and His Brothers: A Four Part Story* discuss how Joseph conceals his reactions and entrusts the task of forgiveness to God. It is suggested that Joseph could have addressed their wrongdoing towards him. His trust in God's plan likely guided him to refrain from doing so at that moment. Those who criticize others without considering the timing, context, or situation may come across as unkind, even if they believe they are acting with good intentions, which, in reality, they might only satisfy their ego, convincing themselves that they are forgiving when they are not truly doing so.[45] We could all learn something from Joseph's kind, affectionate, and forbearing temper. Joseph's heart-felt response brings us to another place in our journey to forgiveness and reconciliation.

True forgiveness and reconciliation are unattainable among the offended. In his book, *The Bait of Satan,* John Bevere discusses the trap of offense.[46] "Many people are unable to function properly in God's purpose and calling for their lives because of the wounds, hurts, and offenses in their lives."[47] Bevere tells us that offended people carry the fruit of offense, which includes hurt, anger, outrage, jealousy envy, and resentment.

---

[44] Lee, Hatchard, Hazard, Howard, and Evans, "The Story of Joseph and His Brethren," 1811.

[45] McFayden, "Expository Studies in the Old Testament," 33.

[46] John Bevere, *The Bait of Satan, 20th Anniversary Edition: Living Free from the Deadly Trap of Offense* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2014), 18.

[47] Bevere, *Bait of Satan*, 169.

These fruits hinder and handicap the lives of offended people, keeping them from fulfilling their potential. Offended people are hurt people who judge others by assumptions, appearance, and hearsay.[48] Joseph's extended heart of love and forgiveness towards his brothers displayed his ability to get beyond the hurts and pains of his past. It does not necessarily mention that Joseph had forgotten what had happened to him at the hands of his brothers. In her article entitled, "On the Relationship Between Forgiveness and Resentment in the Sermons of Joseph Butler," Shelby Weitzel elaborates on Butler's view of the usefulness of resentment in the process of forgiveness when not abused by the offended or wounded.[49] Weitzel presents Butler's argument that resentment is useful to the offended or victim and the offender in that resentment motivates the victim to consider forgiveness and the offender to a reflection that perhaps leads to repentance. He tells us that one can forgive and still pursue justice for those affected by the offense.[50]

Bevere teaches that resentment is a fruit of the offended and is a part of the trap of offense Satan has on God's people.[51] Butler feels that resentment is not useless but is necessary to fulfill one's duty of benevolence. Butler preaches that resentment is a response to wrongdoing, and forgiveness is portrayed as a response to resentment. It is not difficult to see why one might agree; forgiving people are not resentful, and resentful people are not compassionate.[52] Forgiveness is the dissolution of resentment. However,

---

[48] Bevere, *Bate of Satan*, 170.

[49] Shelby Weitzel, "On the Relationship Between Forgiveness and Resentment in the Sermons of Joseph Butler," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (2007): 240, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27745094.

[50] Weitzel, "On the Relationship Between Forgiveness and Resentment," 240.

[51] Bevere, *Bait of Satan*, 21.

[52] Bevere, *Bait of Satan*, 22.

the relationship between forgiveness and resentment is more complicated in Butler's eyes. Butler engages the relationship between forgiveness and resentment from the perspective of seeking justice.[53] In the case of Joseph and his brothers, Joseph decided to leave justice in the hands of his God. Joseph's response to his brothers seems to be in total trust in God's plan for their lives.

One cannot help but ask what role God played in Joseph's journey to fulfillment. Charlotte Katzoff examines divine casualty and moral responsibility found in the story of Joseph and his brothers. She discusses the question of the brothers' moral responsibility for having sold Joseph into slavery as a response to the narrative account of divine workings.[54] Katkoff calls the subordination of human action to God's design a "pervasive motif in the biblical narrative."[55] Joseph's reaction to the plea of his brothers that what they meant for evil, God meant it for good, becomes the question at hand. In thinking through Joseph's faith in God's plan, human action is ascribed to God. Katoff explores the real author of that action and upon whom the action may bring praise or blame. Thus, the idea that informs the entire Joseph story is that God works out his saving purposes through sinful means.[56] Van Rod says, "The statement about the brother's evil plans and God's good plan now open the innermost mystery of the Joseph story. God had all the strings in his hand, even where no man could imagine it."[57] There are then two very

---

[53] Bevere, *Bait of Satan*, 24.

[54] Charlotte Katzoff, "Divine Causality and Moral Responsibility in the Story of Joseph and His Brothers," *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly* 47 (1998): 21-22.

[55] Katzoff, "Divine Causality and Moral Responsibility in the Story of Joseph and His Brothers," 21.

[56] Gordon J. Wenham, "Genesis," *Word Biblical Commentary,* vol. 2 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1994), 490.

different points of view as to responsibility found in the story. While the brothers repented for what they accepted as their doing, Joseph took a moral stand on his belief that God's doing brought them to this point: "To preserve numerous people, as he is doing today" (Gen. 50:20).

It is clear that God's plan aims for reconciliation. Joseph, after listening to his brother's pleas and assuring them of his faith, God's plan reveals the essence of God's love for his people. God's plan produces unity within the community. Jacob's divided family has now achieved harmony and a solid foundation for the future. Unlike Abraham and Isaacs's sons, who could not get along, Jacobs's twelve sons initially faced relationships filled with mistrust, deceit, and disunity. Eventually, they reunited as a family, showcasing God's intentions for the future. Christian scholars often view Joseph as a Christ figure who endured unjust suffering but played a role in reconciling his brothers and nations alike.[58] The idea of redemption coming to the world through someone's hardships is showcased in the life, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, our Savior.[59] Joseph and his brothers were able to reconcile without any help, thanks to a change within themselves that allowed them to move past their animosity. Those affected long awaited this transformation, and now they embrace each other with love.[60]

---

[57] Wenham, "Genesis," 490.

[58] Wenham, "Genesis," 360.

[59] Wenham, "Genesis," 493.

[60] Wenham, "Genesis," 491.

Conclusion

The story of Joseph and his challenging relationship with his brothers has shown us the power of repentance and forgiveness. This family was torn apart by the selfish indignation and jealousy Joseph received from his brothers. Once sold by his brothers, Joseph's journey to fulfilling his dream had officially begun. His brothers had committed the ultimate crime against Joseph and would later find out that reconciliation is possible through repentance. God desires his people to live in harmony as a loving community. This text exemplifies the true meaning of the possibilities of reconciliation, the forgiving heart of one brother, and his brothers' repenting heart. The peace of God should rule in your hearts. Unforgiveness impedes the peace God desires for his people to have within themselves and each other.

Joseph demonstrates what all humanity should do: leave judgment to God. I desire that after reading this chapter, the people of God will realize the necessity of repentance and forgiveness. Joseph was careful not to allow his heart to be influenced by anything except the grace that God had given on his journey. Though challenging to accept, Joseph thanked his brothers for being the cause of his rise to the place that God had reached through God’s prevenient grace. Joseph was forgiving because he knew that unforgiveness would have stopped him from getting that place, and his brothers repented because they understood what that same grace could mean to them. To walk in the peace that God desires his people to have, it must resonate with all the importance of bearing or being patient with the shortcomings and faults of others. In doing so, forgiveness becomes the platform on which reconciliation or community can stand. God is forgiving and requires his creation to forgive each other, as God has forgiven them.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

This project and chapter will address and examine the causes of church hurt and unforgiveness among the leadership and parishioners of New Home African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in York, South Carolina. This project aims to evaluate various forms of hurt caused by those in church leadership and others and to determine methods by which those who have suffered such pain can find inner peace, which leads to forgiveness and reconciliation. The problem is the historical hurt and relational conflict suffered among church parishioners. Historically, the congregation has suffered church hurt and relational conflict among its ranks. As a result, many of the congregants have adapted their interactions with each other in ways that do not exhibit forgiveness and unity. Church leaders and parishioners are not at peace with each other, and the effect of this problem has caused further division within the church body. The hypothesis of this final project is if the members of New Home A.M.E. Zion Church understand the effects of unforgiveness, then they will be able to understand the value of forgiveness and how to demonstrate peace within and peace with others to become more spiritually mature and reconcile broken relationships.

The problem is that past experiences have created a level of hurt that keeps the members from forgiving themselves and each other. This unforgiveness has disrupted

individual inner peace and godly fellowship among the parishioners. Mistrust among the parishioners and leaders has caused a divide that has hindered the church from achieving spiritual maturity. In this chapter, I intend to address church hurt and conflict in three religious movements.

Protestant Reformation

The Protestant Reformation, which took place in the sixteenth century, stands out as a pivotal moment in Christian history. In this movement, Christians protested against the rites, customs, and theology of the Roman Catholic Church.[1] The Protestant Reformation is traditionally believed to have begun on October 31, 1517, when Martin Luther posted his ninety-five theses on the church door in Wittenberg. These theses addressed the church's practice of indulgences, which involved granting forgiveness for sins and reducing time in purgatory after death. Luther was against the sale of indulgences and raised questions about the concept of purgatory. While Luther's theses did not directly mention veneration of saints, offering indulgences was a method to attract pilgrims to shrines. Luther's opposition to indulgences had implications for his perspective on pilgrimage.[2] Martin Luther's disdain for the leadership of the Catholic Church, coupled with the consequences he suffered as a result, is noted as a primary reason the Reformation began.

---

[1] Daniel K. Finn, "The Protestant Reformation," in *Christian Economic Ethics: History and Implications* (Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Media, 2013), 159.

[2] Robert Bartlett, "The Protestant Reformation," in *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?: Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 85.

In the sixteenth century church, Martin Luther is credited for being the only person to stand up to the Catholic Church and address the corruption that has been happening in recent years. The events that unfolded in the century were indeed significant. It is worth noting that attempts at reforming the Christian church in the Western world had been made long before then. Historians have documented endeavors to improve the faith and customs many centuries prior to Luther's time. One notable instance was the Lateran Council of 1215, which mandated universal auricular confession, urging all believers to confess their wrongdoings as a step towards leading a conscientious Christian life on a daily basis. The call of Francis of Assisi to his followers to choose lives of simplicity and poverty was another part of this process. Charles Taylor sees this "individuating" of Christianity as a critical step, on the one hand, in reform movements of which the reformation is the most dramatic and, on the other, in the later rise of secularism and atheism as cultural rivals to the Christian faith.[3]

Church Corruption

Corruption in the church began to form very early in history after its inception. Division among the leaders of the Catholic Church began when the misinterpretation of the positional authority within leadership ranks. The early church's bishops began to use God's Word to boost their self-interest and positions of power. As the number of bishops increased, meetings among them became more necessary. The early church had good and bad dealings in church leadership; however, from the 500s up to the 1300s, the papacy's

[3] Finn, "The Protestant Reformation," 159.

power increased significantly. The papacy began to fill the power vacuum more and more as kings were weakened.[4]

Most church leaders at that time were connected to papal authority in Rome. Papal authority was the sole spiritual leadership given to the pope, who could dictate or change church doctrine. With this kind of authority, the pope had worldwide control and influence. Not every practitioner agreed with the Roman empire's adopted practices, and things began to worsen.

Three main theological principles caused the reformers to protest the Catholic Church. They challenged the authority of the scriptures. One was the authority of the scriptures referred to as the Sola Scriptura, which means by scripture alone. "Sola Scriptura," meaning "Scripture," stands out as one of the recognizable symbols of the Protestant Reformation. In 1638, The English theologian William Chillingworth exclaimed, “The Bible, I say, the Bible only is the religion of Protestants.”[5] The essence is straightforward; genuine enlightenment resides in holy scriptures and not in organizations, like the collective wisdom of early church leaders, religious rituals, authoritative church doctrines, everyday Christian devotion, and the like. The divine presence manifests in scripture, where we should seek to unveil God's message, intentions, and guidance for our existence.[6] This belief system suggested that Christians should rely on the Scriptures for guidance in matters of faith and life. Accordingly, the teachings and traditions of the church should be secondary to the scriptures.

---

[4] James G. Kiecker, *Martin Luther and The Long Reformation: From Response to Reform in the Church* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwest Publishing House, 1992), 26.

[5] Paul O’Callaghan, “‘Sola Scriptura’ and the Spirit-Guided Transmission of the Faith,” in *God and Mediation: Retrospective Appraisal of Luther the Reformer* (Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Media, 2017), 79.

[6] O’Callaghan, “Sola Scriptura,” 79.

On the other hand, Roman Catholics held the view that both the scriptures and church practices carried importance. Luther, an expert in scripture, emphasized the significance of the Bible. He produced commentaries on books of the Old Testament, particularly Isaiah and Psalms. In his analysis of the New Testament, he extensively discussed Paul's letters with an interest in Galatians and Romans due to their portrayal of justification by faith as central to the gospel message. Despite this emphasis on scripture, Luther's theology laid down a principle for Protestantism: that we receive God's Word exclusively through scripture. According to beliefs, scripture conveys divine authority, clarity, effectiveness, and sufficiency. Therefore, Luther firmly asserted that there is no necessity for papal authority or other interpreters; the Scriptures' meaning is clear and adequate for every believer. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, expressed it this way; "The Church should always be evaluated based on the Scripture, not the way. " Consequently, sola Scriptura effectively became the guiding principle of the Reformation in practice.[7]

Another doctrine of the reformers was Sola Fide, which means by faith alone. This doctrine emphasizes that only faith justifies Christians, not good works or anything the church does for its believers. The broader principle of Sola Gratia, which means by grace alone, supported the doctrine of Sola Fide and clarified this principle. Therefore, the reformers were calling Christians back to the fundamental teachings of the scriptures, where Apostle Paul asserts that people are saved by grace through faith. The church bought the part about grace but insisted that we access grace through our works. Luther believes God takes responsibility for the whole thing: God is loving and gracious. God

[7] O'Callaghan, "Sola Scriptura," 82.

forgives us, accepts us, and declares us righteous. No work on our part is necessary. This is why, while the full term is "justification by grace, through faith," many people have shortened it to justification by faith. It is essential to see just how strongly Luther believes that not only is God loving and gracious, but that simply accepting in faith that God forgives you makes it a reality in your life.[8] Luther's main concern is to address the issue of how faith is able to deliver such benefits to believers. Luther emphasizes "the critical role of faith in establishing an intimate relationship between Christ and the believer."[9]

The third key belief of the reformers centered around the idea of the priesthood of all believers. According to the scriptures, every believer is part of a priesthood in God's eyes, with Jesus Christ serving as the high priest. The scriptures also emphasize that Jesus Christ is the intermediary between God and humanity, rendering a mediator unnecessary.

However, the Roman Church did not rely on scriptures to justify the idea of priesthood. As a result, the reformers rejected the authority of the pope's indulgences, the value of deeds, and the veneration of saints such as Mary, Jesus' mother. Protestants saw the Reformation as a return to Christianity, as depicted in the Bible. Martin Luther contended that there is no difference in status, between priests and ordinary believers. The central fault of the Romanists and priests is three-fold. Romanists felt they were only subject to spiritual authority and not secular authority (princes, lords, craftsmen, and farmers).[10] Martin rejected this belief and started teaching the concept known as the "priesthood of all believers." He emphasized that all Christians act as priests through their

---

[8] David J. Lose, *Making Sense of Martin Luther* (Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Media, 2017), 37.

[9] Alister E. McGarth, *The Christian Theology Reader* (Chichester, UK: John Wiley and Sons, Incorporated, 2016), 341.

[10] Magrath, *The Christian Theology Reader*, 412.

baptism, faith, and adherence to the gospel. The only differentiation he acknowledged was in their roles, duties, and tasks.[11]

Indulgences

Amidst so many theological violations considered by Martin Luther and fellow Christians of his day, the selling of indulgences was introduced to the already suffering and hurting lower class of society. The root of corruption identified within the Catholic Church was related to the practice of selling indulgences. St. Jerome (circa 347–420) believed that Christians had two methods for dealing with sin: baptism, which absolved guilt and punishment for all sins, and penance, which addressed sins or those committed after baptism.[12]

Committing a sin meant ignoring God's explicit instructions, resulting in severe consequences. Being in a state of sin was believed to disconnect a person from God. Expose them to the possibility of punishment in hell, causing feelings of guilt and fear of retribution.[13] Baptist was viewed as a more muscular grace that remitted the guilt and penalty of all sin and was only needed once. However, the sacrament of penance was considered a means of moving the sinner from sin into grace. Although able to be done, the significance of this ritual varied in that while it completely absolved one of sin it merely lessened the severity of punishment from eternal to temporal. According to Peter

---

[11] Magrath, *The Christian Theology Reader*, 413.

[12] Timothy J. Wengert, *The Annotated Luther: The Roots of Reform,* eds. Timothy J. Wengert, Hans J. Hillerbrand, and Kirsi I. Stjerna (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 13.

[13] Wengert, *The Annotated Luther,* 13.

Lombard penance was among the seven sacraments of the church. The act of penance included remorse, admitting wrongdoing, and making amends.[14]

Indulgences were an aspect of the sacrament of penance, particularly as they allowed the church to show leniency by reducing or even pardoning the punishment for serious sins. By engaging in actions, such as making donations that honored Christ, Mary, or other saints, individuals could earn indulgences. These indulgences fell into two categories: partial ones, where the punishment for sin was lessened, and full ones, which granted forgiveness for all sins committed up to the moment of receiving the indulgence. Both types of indulgences were granted under the Pope's authority.[15] Pope Clement VI (1291–1352) officially connected this collection of blessings to indulgences, which served as a form of atonement for sins in the eyes of justice and would be stored in the "treasury of merits" established by Christ and the saints. With the authority granted by Christ (Matt. 16:19), the pope could grant access to this storehouse to believers who purchased an indulgence.[16]

Luther connected with others in strong criticism of ceremonies, papalism, more especially, indulgences. The decree known as the Indulgence was authorized in 1515 by the Archbishop of Mayence and Magdeburg to fund the construction of St. Peters Basilica. It granted buyers forgiveness for their sins and the ability to confess to any priest challenging the authority of clergy. This Indulgence sparked discontent, prompting

---

[14] Wengert, *The Annotated Luther,* 14.

[15] Wengert, *The Annotated Luther,* 16.

[16] Wengert, *The Annotated Luther,* 17.

Martin Luther to critique it in his theses, arguing against the notion that salvation could be bought with money.[17]

He proposed that Indulgence functioned as a tool to attract wealth from individuals. It was emphasized that the pope's judgments were considered flawless. In 1518, Luther took a step further by challenging the pope's power concerning matters of doctrine and the hierarchy of the Church Council, which he believed surpassed that of the pope. Luther's Ninety-Five Theses were written in time for the eve of All Saints' Day, October 31, 1517—a significant time when pilgrims came to Wittenberg to venerate the relics in the castle church. The theses have become one of the most famous documents in the history of the world.[18] Luther's frustration with the church finally prompted him to take his message to the streets. He preached sermons and wrote many letters to gain support for his thesis. Luther soon made his argument much more pointed and available by publishing "Sermon on Indulgences and Grace," which was read even more widely than the Ninety-Five Theses.[19]

Luther was in considerable danger for the sharp attack on Rome in the Ninety-Five Theses. Luther had prepared an explanation of the Ninety-Five Theses early in the year. However, the publication had been forbidden by his ecclesiastical superior, Bishop Schulze of Brandenburg. It was finally printed in August 1518, with encouragement from Staupitz, who thought the explanation might help clarify Luther's intentions. Copies were sent to Pope Leo X, Bishop Schulze, and Staupitz as Luther's three superiors. He soon

---

[17] Roy Pascal, "Martin Luther and His Times," *Science and Society* 2, no. 3 (1938): 340.

[18] Timothy F. Lull and Derek R. Nelson, "Critic of the Church," in *Resilient Reformer: The Life and Thought of Martin Luther* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 41–72.

[19] Lull and Nelson, "Critic of the Church," 67.

realized the depth of his trouble. In June 1518, Sylvester Prierias, a Dominican theologian, and advisor to the pope, was assigned the role of theological judge of Luther's case. Prierias' summary of Luther's theses caused him to be ordered to appear in Rome to defend himself against charges of heresy.[20]

It was theoretically possible that he could go to Rome, come to an agreement, and return. However, it was far more likely that his opponents there would have better connections and that he would be condemned as a heretic and imprisoned or executed. Luther feared for his life and freedom and fled the area. It had been an explosive fourteen months since the controversy overindulgences began. No one in either Wittenberg or Rome knew just what would happen next. Nevertheless, even with Frederick's refusal, Luther had deeply challenged the church's practices and theology in a way that could not bode well for his survival.[21]

On the 15th of June in the year 1520, Pope Leo X issued a decree known as Exsurge Domine, which began with the words "Arise O Lord" in Latin. While this document aimed to address errors in Germany, it specifically targeted Luther. The decree called for the seizure and burning of his books. Luther was granted a period of sixty days to retract his statements after the decree was publicly displayed in three cities within his region of Germany. He was also required to submit to the authority of the pope and make a pilgrimage to Rome. Failure to comply within the given timeframe would result in excommunication.[22]

---

[20] Lull and Nelson, "Critic of the Church," 69.

[21] Lull and Nelson, "Critic of the Church," 67.

[22] Lull and Nelson, "Critic of the Church," 68.

Martin Luther experienced various forms of hurt inflicted by the church. His stance on his personal theological views about unjust things happening to himself and the citizens around him ultimately landed him in an excommunicated status, labeled as a heretic. In his case, Luther used this hurt to continue writing and teaching about faithful conviction. Eventually, they began to gain support from others, ready to break free from the corruption they experienced under papal authority. The actions Martin Luther took against the evils of the church establishment of his day are viewed by many as the start of the Protestant Movement.[23]

Early African Methodism

As foretasted, the protestant reformation made way for many other church movements, including African Methodism. In this section, I will explore the impact of slavery on the new black church movement that started with the Free African Society. This developed into the African Methodist Episcopal Church and was formally begun under the leadership of Absalom Jones and Richard Allen. Allen would become the first elected and consecrated Bishop of the AME Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, formally started under the leadership of James Varick.

An Undeniable Faith

During the atrocity of the slave era, the way enslaved people were associated was a deep concern to enslavers. These owners took religious gatherings among enslaved people as a threat to their existence. Nonetheless, enslaved Africans relied heavily on the

[23] Lull and Nelson, "Critic of the Church," 70.

practice of their faith in God and their associations with those of the same faith. The inner peace of their faith brought about a means of godly catharsis, which made them resolute in the retention of their faith and the refuge they sought in their churches. Manning explains the accuracy of Genovese's claim that the battle for consciousness, was the issue dividing masters and slaves.[24]

Gramsci noted that a class must have self-awareness to truly embody its identity. The faith of enslaved individuals was fundamental to their essence and their determination to advocate for objectives. It's not surprising that the religion of the enslaved evolved to align with their independent African nature. While some enslaved individuals became detached from their faith, believing that Negroes were disconnected from God, the majority did not merge their beliefs with their master's insincere preaching of brotherhood and salvation.[25] The journey to discovering inner peace is covered in solid will and faith. White society was not always welcoming of enslaved people into Christianity. However, as Manning explains, faith in God's love provided blacks with a rationale to reject a dominative authority over their spirit and lives. He tells us that a personal God and the heart of the oppressed are harmonious and that "when the will of the Divine Providence was opposed to the will of the earthly masters in the slave's perspective, it was the owner who would have to yield."[26]

---

[24] Marable Manning, "The Meaning of Faith in the Black Mind in Slavery," *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 30, no. 4 (1976): 254.

[25] Manning, "The Meaning of Faith in the Black Mind in Slavery," 255.

[26] Manning, "The Meaning of Faith in the Black Mind in Slavery," 255.

The African Methodist Movement

One of African Methodism's most vital characteristics, perhaps making it work successfully, was its community. The church community moved so that their ultimate physical and spiritual liberation hinged upon their faith and fellowship. The African Americans in the states started to stand up for themselves following the emancipation that occurred during the American Revolution. They were not bound to align with the interests of the churches. This assertion of independence eventually led to Richard Allen's protest, who founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Richard Allen was an individual who took on this role.

He was born as a slave to Benjamin Chew in Philadelphia. Thereafter, he and his entire family were sold to a plantation owner near Dover, Delaware, where he matured into adulthood.[27] Under the guidance of teachings, he embraced the faith in 1777 and embarked on his journey as a minister three years later. Impressed by his devotion, his owner granted him permission to lead prayers and deliver sermons at home. He was among the individuals to be swayed by this fervent messenger of God. Following his transformation, Allen developed a belief that slavery was unjust, leading his owner to allow his enslaved individuals to secure their freedom. Allen and his sibling bought their freedom for $2,000 during the times of the Revolutionary War.[28]

Allen underwent a transformation when he embraced the Christian faith. He dedicated himself to spreading the Methodist teachings among individuals in the

---

[27] Carter G. Woodson, "The Independent Church Movement," in *The History of the Negro Church* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1921), 65.

[28] Woodson, "The Independent Church Movement," 66.

communities where he found employment. Upon gaining his freedom, he received an invitation from St. George Methodist Church to deliver sermons to its congregants, resulting in several individuals seeking solace and community within the church's fold.[29] His faith in God and love for his community caused him to care for the well-being of all Africans. Allen believed that blacks needed to own and operate their businesses and institutions. Once he and Absalom Jones started the Free African Society, the idea took root in the growing black community of believers.[30] Allens narrative, renowned for symbolizing autonomy during the Revolutionary Era, showcases how interactions between races shaped social interactions and religious practices in Philadelphia after the Revolution.

Allen's congregation's establishment in the city was no coincidence. The rise in Philadelphia's community was fueled by ex-slaves moving in due to Pennsylvania's anti-slavery laws and the job opportunities provided by the city's growing commercial sector.[31] After the society was established, some of the Methodists, including Free Africans, decided to leave St. Georges due to a disagreement about the segregated seating arrangements in the chapel. During a Sunday service after the church galleries were built, the sexton instructed Allen, Absalom Jones, William White, and other black members to sit in this constructed area. They complied with this request, anticipating that they would be seated above their spots on the ground floor. According to Allen's memoir, "We had

---

[29] Marvin Andrew McMickle, *An Encyclopedia of African American Christian Heritag*e (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2002), 2.

[30] McMickle, *An Encyclopedia of African American Christian Heritag*e, 2.

[31] Dee Andrews and Kathryn Zabelle Derounian, "Notes and Documents," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 108, no. 4 (1984): 471.

not been praying for long before I heard some commotion and hushed conversations."[32] He overheard two members of the chapel's board trying to remove Jones and White from their positions. The African American congregants, feeling deeply upset by the actions of their churchgoers, banded together in solidarity. They stood alongside others who were also offended and harmed by the behavior. Decided to leave St. George Church. Motivated by the needs of his community, he felt compelled to advocate for them. He expressed, "I soon realized there was an opportunity to reach out to and educate my brothers and sisters who have long been neglected with only a few attending public worship."[33] In Philadelphia, he initiated a prayer gathering that attracted forty-two participants. Emboldened by this response, he suggested creating a place of worship for individuals of color. This decision stemmed from the mistreatment he endured from congregants at St. George Methodist Church. Richard Allen and his followers departed to practice their faith without hindrance. Eventually, Richard Allen was. Ordained as the Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Movement

A new split among the Methodists from the group was happening in parts of the country. A group of African Americans, many of whom belonged to the John Street Methodist Episcopal Church in New York City, started the process of separating from that connection in 1796. They hadn't faced trouble with their worship as Richard Allen and his colleagues did in Philadelphia. However, they wanted the freedom to hold their

[32] Andrews and Derounian, "Notes and Documents," 474.

[33] Woodson, *The Independent Church Movement,* 68.

meetings where they could share their gifts with each other and be more supportive. With Bishop Francis Asbury's approval, a group of educated American Methodists like Francis Jacobs, William Brown, Peter Williams, Abraham Thompson, June Scott, Samuel Pontier, Thomas Miller, William Miller, James Varick, and William Hamilton were granted permission for this purpose.[34]

In those days, as more Black members joined the Methodist Episcopal Church in New York City, they decided to construct their place of worship of just meeting separately in the white Methodist building. Eventually, they bought land at the intersection of Church and Leonard Streets along Church Street in New York. Their aspirations materialized on this spot when they built a structure in 1800 known as the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.[35]

Furthermore, the division within the church fueled a desire for complete separation from the white Methodists because their supposed superiors had conflicting opinions on matters of governance. These colored Methodists believed in managing their affairs. Initially, white Methodist preachers served as pastors, with colored local preachers working under them. They informed the Methodists that they no longer wished to rely on them for pulpit assignments and did not want their assets entangled in the issues arising from the proposed incorporation that led to the division. The members of Zion had to make decisions; "Should we rejoin the community?" The answer was no. The

[34] Woodson, *The Independent Church Movement,* 68.

[35] Woodson, *The Independent Church Movement,* 68.

subsequent question was, "Should we align with Bishop Allen?" Again, the answer was negative.[36] They then decided to establish a firm church government of their own.

Several branches of the Christian Church denied them consecrations and ordinations. The Zionites, similar to the Allenites, went on the offensive by expanding their activities through missionaries into areas like Flushing, New Haven, Long Island and even Philadelphia, where some individuals broke away from Richard Allen's group. These individuals established the Wesleyan Church. Aligned themselves with the Zionites. With leaders such as James Varick, George Collins, Charles Anderson, and Christopher Rush at the helm, they formulated the beliefs and rules of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in America. They appointed elders. Eventually established themselves as a national entity in 1821 with James Varick being appointed as its first bishop in 1822.[37]

Conclusion

The church has had various forms of hurt and pain within its ranks since its inception. Whether in the case of Martin Luther and his trial and ex-communication from the Catholic Church or the African Methodist movements discussed, people have gone through a tremendous amount of conflict. This has resulted in excruciating circumstances and suffering of some sort. As people learn to deal with the effects of painful interactions with others, they rely heavily on solid convictions. This was also the case with Martin

[36] Woodson, *The Independent Church Movement,* 72.

[37] Woodson, *The Independent Church Movement*, 82.

Luther, credited for the start of the Protestant Reformation, and Richard Allen and James Varick, who dealt with slavery and the dramatic effects of racism.

The Catholic Church pressured the Roman Empire's citizens for what seemed to be a lust for money. They created a system of indulgences for those who sinned to lessen their days of purgatory suffering. Martin Luther's conviction and compassion led him to write a thesis addressing the things he felt were theological and moral violations committed by the established church. Resolution remained possible if Luther recanted his theory; however, he stood firm on his convictions against the practices of the Catholic Church. As a result, the pope was enraged and ex-communicated Luther from the church. Luther faced a tremendous amount of danger to his freedom and life.

Black Methodists were subjected to Wesleyan evangelists in the context of slavery and during the age of the American Revolution. They heard the enslavers' rhetoric about rights, equality, and human worth in the sermons of both white and black preachers. Moreover, they harnessed these ideas to emancipationist efforts for individual freedom and institutional autonomy. Ensuring institutional autonomy would prove to give the people of the black church community an assurance of their faith in God, as well as ownership in the manifestation of that faith in their theological practices.

They also drew from Wesleyan theology mandates to transpose the spiritual and/or scriptural holiness they gained from their experiences to the hard work of social righteousness realized in societal renewal. Ministers and members fought slavery and articulated liberty language designed to achieve the complete manumission of the black population.

This emancipationist ethos became inextricably woven into the institutional fabric of black Methodist bodies. It established them in rhetoric and practice as defenders of an oppressed racial minority. Ultimately, these well-educated black leaders could take what they had learned from their painful experiences and build a fruitful life morally and societally for themselves and future generations. The leaders of the black Methodist movement were meticulous in their search for a new start for the people of their prospective denominations. Their movements were careful to provide a safe alternative to the racist views of those who served as church leaders in the white church and community. The African Methodist Episcopal Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church remains alive and well.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

This project and chapter will address the effects of unforgiveness among parishioners and leaders at New Home AME Zion Church in York, South Carolina. This project aims to evaluate various forms of church hurt and determine methods to reconcile those who have been hurt by the actions of others and affected by unforgiveness. The problem is that the parishioners of New Home Church have a history of hurtful experiences among themselves that are keeping the members from forgiving themselves and each other. Unforgiveness has overshadowed individual inner peace, and there is a level of mistrust among parishioners and leaders that must be addressed before the church can reach spiritual maturity. Therefore, the hypothesis of this project is if the members of New Home AME Zion Church understand the effects of unforgiveness and broken relationships, then they will be able to understand the value of forgiveness and how to demonstrate reconciliation by having peace within and peace with others to become more spiritually mature.

People often encounter hurtful experiences with others. The way in which one processes and understands the importance of processing an appropriate response is paramount to the goal of reconciliation. Reconciliation, being the goal, is a direct reflection of the benefits of modeling one's life after the principles of God. When

forgiveness is not properly prioritized in each encounter one has with others, resentment becomes a resting place that has ill-affected many people who are in the church. Resentment is one of the root causes of unforgiveness in that people often tend to be upset or indignant as a response to something that is felt to be inappropriate. The unfortunate aspect of resentment is that many people do not give enough credit to its far-reaching consequences. Resentment affects many aspects of a person's life. It is mentally impactful because it affects one's ability to justifiably consider all the pieces needed to bring peace and reconciliation. The mental impact of resentment often affects various parts of a person's life. Both the physical and emotional well-being of a resentful person threatens peace within and reconciliation with others who have the same confession of faith.

Physically, resentment and unforgiveness create unnecessary stress and anxiety within the unforgiving. Subsequently, stress causes several other kinds of physical ailments within one's body. Emotionally, resentment and stress can negatively impact other aspects of a person's life. Resentment towards a particular person of importance could affect the relationship an unforgiving person has with others in the family or with co-workers or can even be a hindrance in working together with others at church. Unforgiveness has hindered the work of so many people who find it hard to rely on a trusted teammate to get the job done.

As I explore the negative impact unforgiveness has on inner peace and the struggle it causes in what could be a thriving family or faith community, it is important to note that being unforgiving is a major cause of spiritual turmoil, which is spiritually and emotionally tasking. Unforgiveness can lead to turmoil in a person's journey, hindering

their growth and affecting their prayer life. This can make worship feel insincere and devoid of meaning, as it's hard to honor the divine while holding onto emotions. Additionally, resentment can tarnish one's ability to be an influence on others. Choosing to forgive enables us to let go of bitterness stemming from hurts, allowing God to mend not only the pain but also heal relationships and foster genuine reconciliation.

This project and chapter will also address God's nature in the ministry of reconciliation and the character of God displayed in the lives of those who love him and are committed to his eternal community. Reconciliation is a key attribute in the work of salvation.

Soteriology

Soteriology is a theology dealing with salvation especially as effected by Jesus Christ.[1] The study of soteriology seeks to define the theology or doctrine of salvation. In Christianity, salvation, also called "deliverance" or "redemption," is the saving of human beings from sin and its consequences.[2] The two key words are redemption and sin. Redemption is accomplished by a deliverer who acts as a redeemer to those who are subject to consequences for sin or offense. Soteriology, when viewed through the lens of systematic theology, deals with God’s salvific plan for mankind. It is rooted in Christology, which is the study of the saving work of the life of Christ. It also deals with the pneumatology or the work of the Holy Spirit in carrying out that plan to the elect of

[1] Merriam-Webster Dictionary, “Soteriology,” Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/soteriology.

[2] Wilfred Graves, Jr., *In Pursuit of Wholeness: Experiencing God's Salvation for the Total Person* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2011), 9, 22, 74-75.

God.[3] Through the redemptive work of Christ and the Holy Spirit, mankind is redeemed back to God.[4] The doctrine of salvation is thematically etched in both the Old and New Testament and centers around the person and work of Jesus Christ.[5] The theology of salvation stands at the heart of the Christian faith. Historic Christian confession claims that the God who gave the world its being acts to redeem it from its current conditions of disorder, thus restoring otherwise lost creatures to fellowship with their Creator.[6] Soteriology is deeply related to God's plan for mankind's reconciliation through redemption. From a soteriological perspective, reconciliation, according to Paul and the Pauline writings, is relational. It translates from broken relationships to those that are restored. As such, it presupposes a situation of conflict, which, within the framework of the metaphor of reconciliation, is described as enmity against God. According to Gunton in his assessment of the Paul school of thought, this conflict is "the universal condition of fallen humanity in which both Jews and Gentiles are held captive."[7] God's separation from humanity exists as an active or passive state that humans cannot change through their actions or natural abilities. God reveals himself to humans only through his anger during this state of separation from God. According to Gunton, the Pauline writings suggest that reconciling action belongs to God alone.[8]

---

[3] Kelly M. Kapic and Wesley Vander Lugt, *Pocket Dictionary of the Reformed Tradition*, The IVP Pocket Reference Series (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 112.

[4] George Thomas Kurian, *Nelson's New Christian Dictionary: The Authoritative Resource on the Christian World* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 677.

[5] Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Victor Books, Wheaton, IL: 1987), 277.

[6] M. A. Rae, *God of Salvation: Soteriology in Theological Perspective* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 1, https://doi-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.4324/9781315585260.

[7] Colin E. Gunton, *The Theology of Reconciliation* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003), 23, ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=742784.

Salvation

According to Hamme, salvation is intertwined with the idea of "deliverance, victory, and safety." He further dissects the definition of salvation by sharing both the Hebrew and Greek definitions. Hamme explains that the nouns for salvation in Hebrew יְשׁוּעָה (*yĕšûʿâ*, "salvation") and Greek σωτηρία (*sōtēria*, "salvation"), "generally signify deliverance, safety, and wholeness, and, in the Hebrew Bible, victory."[9] The need for a Savior or deliverer comes to light in the doctrine of salvation. The redemptive work of God and Christ is noted in soteriology. O'Collins denotes that the New Testament "applies the term savior to God eight times (Luke 1:47 and 1 Tim 1:1) and to Jesus sixteen times (for example, Luke 2:11, John 4:42; Acts 13:23; Phil 3:20). No one else is called savior."[10] O'Collins also the of the *ruomai*, which is the "rescuer" or "deliver." Whenever the deliverer is named, it is always God, as in verses found in Matthew 27:43, 2 Corinthians 1:10, Colossians 1:13, 2 Peter 2:7, or Jesus (1 Thessalonians 1:10).[11]

In Matthew 1:2, Mary was to call her son Jesus, which is to say that God is our salvation. This son, who is called Jesus, will save the people of God from their sins. In Luke 2:1, 10-11, Jesus Christ is the giver of peace and salvation. According to Acts 2:38, 5:31, salvation comes through no other name than the name of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul makes it clear in Acts 4:12 that salvation only comes through Christ Jesus: "There is

---

[8] Gunton, *The Theology of Reconciliation*, 24.

[9] Joel T. Hamme, "Salvation," *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum et al (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), 50.

[10] Gerald G. O'Collins, "Salvation," *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary,* ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 910–911.

[11] O'Collins, "Salvation," 910.

salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

One of the most relevant questions concerning salvation is: who is to be saved, and from what are they saved? Through the crucified and risen Jesus comes the "forgiveness of sins" (Acts 13:3), and all mankind, both Jews and Gentiles, are to be "saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 15:11).[12]

O'Collins notes how the Pastoral Epistles are full of the language of salvation where God is described as our Saviour who wants all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:3-4; Tit. 2:11) and Christ Jesus who came into this world to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). Thus, "the manifestation of the love and kindness of God our Savior, who saved us, through Jesus Christ our Savior" (Tit. 3:4, 6). The coordination of God and Jesus as Savior comes to its apex in the phrase concerning the hope that is within us, which can be translated either as the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ (Tit. 2:13).[13] Jesus took care of mankind's salvation by becoming a man. He suffered, died, was buried, and resurrected for the ransom cost of man's salvation. With his incarnation came the proclamation of salvation to the world. Jesus taught and demonstrated the core principles of God's salvific plan for mankind. Those who believed and received his actions and message were saved (Mk. 16:16).[14]

Gunton teaches that through Christ's death, the act of reconciliation takes place. He further states that through God's reconciling act in Christ, believers attain peace,

---

[12] O'Collins, "Salvation," 910–911.

[13] O'Collins," Salvation," 911.

[14] Gerald Bray, "Jesus' Accomplishment of Salvation," in *Lexham Survey of Theology*, ed. Mark Ward et al (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018).

which signifies both the elimination of hostility and the creation of an enduring bond with God through Christ. The new state of reconciliation with God through Christ requires Christ's resurrection to new life and spiritual liberation of believers from earthly constraints through the Spirit's indwelling.[15] Through reconciliation with God, believers experience an unbreakable bond of love in Christ that separates them from divine affection. Through faith believers experience reconciliation both in their present earthly life and they maintain hope for salvation during the final judgment. Through a historical event, reconciliation became real, and believers continued to experience it from their present lives until the end of time.[16]

Atonement

God provided redemption of humanity through the full payment of the penalty of sin. The ransom theory of atonement, common among Church Fathers, states that Christ died as an expiatory sacrifice to ransom human beings from the power of the devil (Mk. 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:6). Anselm taught the satisfaction theory of atonement by which Christ paid the infinite debt owed by the human race to God as a result of sin. This, however, precludes forgiveness because if a debt is paid in full, it cannot be forgiven.

In the Old Testament, atonement is seen as ritualistic. Rodriques teaches that the idea of atonement is indicative of a fractured relationship between God and humankind that can be restored through “ritualistic activity.” To her, atonement in the Old Testament

[15] Gunton, *The Theology of Reconciliation*, 30.

[16] Gunton, *The Theology of Reconciliation*, 32.

is best described in the Hebrew verb כָּפַר (*kapar),* which means "to cover."[17] The atonement rituals were mostly made up of animal sacrifices under the supervision of priests. At the center of the ritualistic concept of atonement is that underlying discourse of what Rodriques calls "expiation and purification."[18] This concept captures the sinful state of human beings and a fragmented relationship with the God of wrath. Atonement then became the acceptable sacrifice or the covering for sin, the forgiveness of the wrong, and the conduit to restoration or reconciliation with God.

According to Brey, the heart of the thought concerning the saving work of Christ is "his death on the cross, where he made "atonement" for our sins—the payment that reconciles us to the Father and puts us "at one" with him."[19] He writes that Christ's death on the cross symbolizes the price he paid for the sins of mankind "so that those who believe in him and trust in his work on their behalf are saved through him rather than by anything we may achieve or perform."[20] According to Grudem, the death of Christ is likened to paying a ransom in the same sense of the Latin words *redemptio* and *emptus*. *Redemptio* refers to the buying back of something, and *emptus* refers to being or purchased.[21]

The concept of atonement has a different meaning from various theologians in their declared faiths. The Calvinists thought of atonement as a penal satisfaction theory in

---

[17] Adriani Milli Rodrigues, "Atonement," *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), 158-159.

[18] Rodrigues, "Atonement," 162.

[19] Bray, "Jesus' Accomplishment of Salvation." 90-91.

[20] Bray, "Jesus' Accomplishment of Salvation," 90.

[21] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Nottingham, UK: Zondervan, 1994), 580.

that God's sins of the elect were satisfied by the death of Christ and were seen as a vicarious punishment. The emphasis is not on debt but on justice. In Wesleyan theology, the main idea of atonement centers around propitiation. According to Wesley, "the Atonement is God's method of becoming immanent in a sinful race." Calvinists teach limited atonement for the elect, while Arminians teach unlimited atonement for all.[22]

The Christological reference to the metaphor of reconciliation is more comprehensive than those of the metaphors of sacrifice or atonement. These refer only to the death of Christ, reconciliation to his death and resurrection, since it includes the establishment of a new permanent relationship to Christ and, through him, to God the Father in the Spirit.[23] Gunton further states:

> The work of Christ is described in terms of identification and exchange: he who was innocent of sin is made one with sinfulness, so that in him we might be made one with the righteousness of God. The logic of 'God was in Christ' is extended by the writer of Colossians in the statement: For in him God in all his fullness chose to dwell and through him to reconcile all things to himself.[24]

Sin

In systematic theology, there is a clear distinction between the concepts of original sin and actual sin. Original sin is defined as the condition of being at enmity with God, and this is believed to have been brought about by Adam and his sin in the Garden of Eden, while actual sin is the real or concrete expression of this condition by people and the societies in which they find themselves. There is much debate as to whether humans

---

[22] George Thomas Kurian, *Nelson's New Christian Dictionary: The Authoritative Resource on the Christian World* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 75.

[23] Gunton, *The Theology of Reconciliation,* 24.

[24] Gunton, *The Theology of Reconciliation*, 25.

are held accountable for original sin in the Christian tradition, with Western Augustinians supporting the notion, whereas Eastern Orthodox Christians do not.[25] However, most theologians agree that actual sin implies blameworthy guilt and thus elicits the judgment of God. Many of the theological systems also believe that actual sin is an inherent part of those who are under the domain of original sin. This is called in the Reformed tradition the 'moral inability' of the unregenerate to obey God.[26]

Stratis defines the concept of sin in both Hebrew and Greek terms. Some Hebrew terms for sin refer to committing crimes, transgressing the law, missing the mark, and going astray. This is similar in definition to the crime Joesph's brothers repented to him for committing against him in the Biblical Foundations Chapter. As stated there, crime and transgression are synonymous with an offense against God, an individual, or a nation. He also lists some key Greek terms for sin, such as "falling short of a given standard, transgressing the law, breaking a command."[27]

All sin seems to lead to the violation of God's standard, either against himself or his creation. Moreover, the concept of sin need should not be confined to transgressive acts alone but should also include the sin of omission, which is to neglect or refuse to act "in accordance with one's obligation, "as stated in James 4:17: "Whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin."[28]

---

[25] Kurian, *Nelson's New Christian Dictionary,* 77.

[26] Justin Stratis, "Actual Sin," in *Lexham Survey of Theology*, ed. Mark Ward et al (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 45-46.

[27] Stratis, "Actual Sin," 92.

[28] Stratis, "Actual Sin," 93.

Forgiveness

Seeking forgiveness opens opportunities for reconciliation. Forgiveness based on repentance provides a lasting opportunity. In contrast, a reconciliation that is not founded on repentance will likely be shallow, short-lived, and ineffective.

Forgiveness is etched into the framework of the character of God and God's desire and love for the community of believers. Godlikeness is key in living out the characteristics God has among others, namely forgiveness. The teachings of Christ to be god-like are found throughout the gospels. The Gospel of Luke mentions a potential within individuals. In Matthew's Gospel, there is an idea of transformation towards godliness. John's Gospel appears to focus on believers becoming divine. While Marks's Gospel doesn't explicitly mention divinization, it does hint at changes through stories of people following God will being considered as Jesus' siblings experiencing healing as a form of intervention and witnessing the power of the kingdom of God manifesting (Mk. 3:35; 5:30; 9:1).[29]

Forgiveness takes godlikeness to be accomplished correctly. Finlan explores the teachings of Christ concerning what he calls the kingdom within, found in Luke's Gospel. Finland suggests that Jesus' teachings point the believer to the realization that the kingdom does exist but within the individual believer. Finlan believes that individuals possess the spiritual capacity to connect with God's kingdom even though some may resist this idea, especially since it is directed towards Jesus' adversaries, the Pharisees. The fact that this message challenges beliefs is what makes it authentic, according to

[29] Stephen Finlan, "Deification in Jesus' Teaching," in *Theosis II: Deification in Christian Theology,* ed. Vladimir Kharlamov (Cambridge, UK: The Lutterworth Press, 2012), 21.

Finlan. He suggests that this concept may be too revolutionary for those who adhere to doctrine, including modern-day scholars who doubt that Jesus would have made the kingdom easily accessible to Pharisees! What astonishes Finlan in this passage is Jesus' assertion that the kingdom already resides within individuals. While it may not be fully realized yet it exists "within" you.[30] The suggestion to introspect suggests that individuals should search for signs of God's influence within their thoughts, principles, and religious journey. The Apostle Paul discusses the idea of self-reflection: " Our inner self is being revitalized daily" (2 Corinthians 4;16). Believers possess the "mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2;16) and are also undergoing a transformation to understand God's intentions (Romans 12;2).

Kingil Kim's work delves into the aspects of theosis as portrayed in the book of Matthew. Through an analysis of forgiveness within Jesus's teachings on church discipline, Kim emphasizes that forgiveness, when embodied as a way of life, serves as a key to our connection with God. He highlights the importance of practicing forgiveness through actions like prayer and repentance. According to Kim, embodying forgiveness through these practices aligns us with the Father's will for love and mercy in Heaven.[31]

Kim explains in Matthew’s Gospel the connection between God's authority and human actions when Jesus tells his disciples, "Whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18:18). The divine authority is intertwined with response. As part of God’s creation,

---

[30] Finlan, “Deification,” 24.

[31] Kim Kangil, “A Theology of Forgiveness: Theosis in Matthew 18:15–35,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 16, no. 1 (June 2022): 40–56, doi: https://doi.org/10.5325/jtheointe.16.1.0040.

humans are meant to reflect God's essence and embody His principles on Earth. In Kim's view, Matthew 18:18 highlights the significance of forgiveness in the relationship between God and humanity.[32]

In his book *Embodying Forgiveness,* L. Gregory Jones discusses how forgiveness is rooted in the relationship between God and humanity. Jones emphasizes that at the core of forgiveness is the belief in a God who embodies peace, selflessness, and unity within the Trinity and is willing to bear the burden of forgiveness to bring "humanity back into communion with God's Kingdom."[33] Jones argues that truly embracing forgiveness means connecting with the Triune God. He emphasizes that forgiveness should be more than words or feelings but should instead manifest in Christian practices and habits, especially as we integrate into Christ's Body, the church. This view presents forgiveness as a way of life that must be actively cultivated within the church's disciplines. Viewing forgiveness as an integrated aspect of life offers a perspective on the relationship between humanity and God regarding communion. Expanding on Jones' ideas, this study aims to illustrate an element of transformation in Matthew's Gospel by exploring the concept of forgiveness through interpretation.[34]

Expanding on the research by Jones, this chapter seeks to showcase an aspect of theosis found in Matthew's Gospel by examining forgiveness through a lens embodying the divine. I will delve into themes of forgiveness, repentance, and relational theologies. Viewing forgiveness as a lived practice serves as a tool for understanding theosis. When

---

[32] Kangil, "Theology of Forgiveness," 17.

[33] L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), Kindle Version.

[34] Jones, "Embodying Forgiveness," 58-59.

referring to theosis, I am highlighting our involvement in existence. The concept of theosis encapsulates our engagement with the essence and intentions of God the Father through embracing forgiveness as a core element.

Jones suggests that the Triune God is defined by his loving nature and his care for all creation. He desires to engage in a relationship with his creation. Human beings are made in the image and likeness of God, indicating that they are meant for loving connections with God, each other, and the entire Creation. It is emphasized that we are not meant to live in isolation or as self-contained individuals. Therefore, our true purpose and fulfillment lie in embracing our ability to love and participate in the harmony of God's creation.[35]

According to Jones, the brokenness of the fellowship or communion between God and his creation is sin. Whether sin is what one person does to another or things they fail to do for another, the need for forgiveness is directly related to sin.[36] Jones explains that the concept of sin and forgiveness goes beyond guilt and delves into the idea of brokenness. He suggests that we all bear some responsibility for this brokenness through our actions and behaviors that hinder our connection not with God but with each other and the world around us. Therefore, forgiveness entails letting go of habits in order to strive towards becoming individuals capable of fostering meaningful relationships. Forgiveness serves a better purpose than absolving guilt; it embodies the essence of love by fostering unity and connection.[37]

---

[35] Jones, “Embodying Forgiveness,” 61.

[36] Jones, “Embodying Forgiveness,” 62.

[37] Jones, “Embodying Forgiveness,” 63.

God functions as the exclusive Creator of reconciliation. The biblical text does not state that God requires reconciliation or receives any reconciling action. The Bible repeatedly emphasizes that God loved humanity first after they fell into sin. God demonstrated his love for humanity through Christ's death when we were still sinful beings. The God who expresses wrath directs it toward people who cut themselves off from him. Through Christ, believers experience reconciliation with God so they can establish an unbreakable love relationship with God's love. The death and resurrection of Christ represented the ultimate purpose of his message and life as the definitive proof of God's nature.[38] The non-reciprocal nature of divine reconciliation and divine love establishes that the reconciling act through Christ involves identification and exchange. The identification of God with his enemies becomes the only means to achieve reconciliation with people who cannot start reconciliation because they remain trapped in separation from God thus divine love extends to those who cannot love God.[39]

Repentance

The negative impacts of holding grudges can be overwhelming, especially when it comes to relationships within the community. Since God values unity and togetherness, and as humans created in God’s likeness, we need to prioritize forgiveness, whether we are the ones who caused harm or were hurt. True forgiveness and reconciliation start with being connected to God. Repentance is a concept highlighted in both the Old and New Testaments, playing a role in one's spiritual journey. Mark Boda emphasizes in his book

[38] Gunton, *The Theology of Reconciliation*, 25.

[39] Gunton, *The Theology of Reconciliation*, 25.

Return to Me that repentance is intricately woven into our relationship with the Triune God.[40] Repentance is thematic throughout both the Old and New Testaments. Boda points out that a return to a faithful relationship means that passages in the Bible that speak of admission of sin or remorse over sin are relevant to the topic of repentance.[41] Humans are said to resemble God and connect with Him through the concept of salvation, where repentance plays a role. The idea of repentance is repeatedly highlighted in parts of the holy scriptures. Boda delves into repentance as depicted in the Old Testament, emphasizing that it signifies a change in one's connection, actions, and emotions and is often expressed through words or certain rituals.[42]

God's wish for a connection with his people centers around the idea of repentance. God emphasizes the importance of a relationship in the Old Testament covenant, urging a transformation in behavior. Boda highlights this shift as a transition from idol worship to embracing a relationship with Yahweh through repentance. For God's community to thrive and reconciliation to occur, individuals must undergo a change in behavior, starting with repentance. This personal transformation involves trading deities for a connection with God. Boda stresses that repentance entails adjustments, specifically moving away from actions that hinder the bond between Yahweh and his people. In his view, repentance signifies transitioning from conduct to behaviors that nurture a relationship with God.[43] Not only does repentance require a behavioral change, but Boda suggests that

---

[40] Mark Boda, *Return to Me: A Biblical Theology of Repentance* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 1.

[41] Boda, *Return to Me*, 31.

[42] Boda, *Return to Me*, 35.

[43] Boda, *Return to Me*, 145.

it is not merely moralism. Repentance also requires an "inner reorientation," in that repentance refers to a change "in one's heart or soul."[44] Gordan Marino has a quote fitting for this discussion, "But there is also a love with which I love God, and this love has only one expression in language—it is "repentance." If I do not love him this way, I do not love him absolutely, out of my innermost being."[45] Repentance is an expression of an inner reorientation that reconciles one with God in love daily.

In his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer explains how the world without true repentance has cheapened God's grace. This is the concept of a life free from the discipline it costs believers in their lifestyle to be reconciled to God. Believers are to conform to a life of forgiveness and love, as well as a level of personal discipline that can afford the costly grace spoken of by Bonhoeffer. Instead, believers have made their own religious diagram and have left out God's plan for their lives. This is what Bonhoeffer calls "Cheap grace."[46]

According to Boda, a call to repentance in the Book of Isaiah requires its readers to turn to Yahweh in faith. According to Boda, repentance is an expression of both an external behavioral change and an internal change in affection.[47] God does not always call man to repentance to himself but to others. Repentance is not only needed to repair our broken relationships with God, but he calls us to do the same with others. Robert Gibbs discusses the need to repent by answering Why Repent? Gibbs tells us that

---

[44] Boda, *Return to Me*, 146.

[45] John Wilson, "Why Forgiveness Requires Repentance," *Philosophy* 63, no. 246 (1988): 194.

[46] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 2012).

[47] Boda, *Return to Me*, 149.

repentance involves a series of actions aimed at fixing fractured relationships. This series comprises repentance, admitting wrongdoing, making amends, restoring harmony, and granting forgiveness. Gibbs aims to explore why it is important to mend harm inflicted on someone. According to his assessment, the parties involved bear varying duties.[48] In my estimation, Boda's account of repentance being an extrinsic and intrinsic change and that the offender should have an inner reorientation as a foundation for reconciliation is conducive to Gibbs's answer to why one should repair the harm done to another person. The answer is deeply rooted in God's desire for a relationship with his creation and the exact relationship between those he created. Repentance is the personal responsibility to mend what is broken.

In the Old Testament, the sources of repentance are in two categories: actions and words. Boda explains that the experience of divine discipline mainly dominates the actions category. Orientation and behavior play a significant part in the theme of repentance in the Old Testament. Although Boda suggests that relationship and affection are signs of true repentance, he points out that repentance in the Old Testament is multidimensional; however, the foundational principle of repentance in the Old Testament is to change externally and internally. External change is a behavioral change, and internal change is a change in affection.[49]

Boda suggests that repentance is a call to action and a step toward forgiveness and reconciliation. Boda discusses repentance in the Old Testament as a "shift in relationship, in behavior, and affection" accompanied by verbal or ceremonial acts. He further states

---

[48] Robert Gibbs, "Why Repent?" in *Why Ethics?: Signs of Responsibilities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 4.

[49] Boda, *Return to Me*, 148.

that relational changes in the Old Testament are pointed toward one giving up or shifting attention from foreign or strange gods to Yahweh.[50] Bonhoffer goes even deeper by addressing the lack of the believer's will to live a life that will cost them something to be a true disciple.[51] Jones says the relationship between God and mankind is an "ever-deepening friendship with the Triune God and others."[52] Repentance is to be viewed as a segway to reconciling humans' relationship with God and each other. According to Jones, it is not to be focused primarily on apologizing. Still, it should give intent to the "reconciliation of brokenness, the restoration of communion- with God, with one another, and with the whole Creation of God."[53]

Salvation, or the way to God, is viewed differently across theological beliefs. These theological beliefs shape the moral understanding of those who follow and mold the fabric of one's path to salvation through repentance. From a theological perspective, repentance is seen as a path to salvation in most ecclesiological settings. To better understand whether repentance is directly correlated with salvation, I want to look at a few theological influences and their emphasis on the importance of repentance.

Demarest suggests that according to existentialists, saving faith is not about belief but also about deep inner passion and complete involvement. Embracing a life of discipleship entails a commitment to following God's will and accepting Jesus Christ as the bridge between humanity and divinity. This faith involves prioritizing God's guidance

---

[50] Boda, *Return to Me*, 150.

[51] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 38.

[52] Jones, "Embodying Forgiveness," 11.

[53] Jones, "Embodying Forgiveness," 30.

over desires, allowing Christ to dwell in one's heart, and experiencing authenticity. It provides serenity by easing worries, offering forgiveness for transgressions, unlocking potential, and enriching one's journey through life.[54] Demarest points out the views of liberationist theology concerning repentance through the theological views of John C. Bennet. According to Demarest, Bennet tells us that repentance pertains more to Christians than non-Christians.[55] Bennet expresses his view on Christians and repentance:

> Repentance is a natural part of the Christian life. Often, we find that the Saints are the most conscious about their sins. They feel responsibility for evils of which they may have been in no degree the cause…. The habit of continual repentance enables us to grow; it keeps the conscious awake; it helps to preserve us from self-righteousness. It may keep us from the socially destructive tendency to concentrate on the sins of others, particularly the sins of opponents or enemies.[56]

Demarest explains that in theology, repentance is seen as a choice to turn away from sin, while faith involves acknowledging the truth and putting trust in God. He further explains that the human response to repentance is made possible through prevenient grace and that grace frees sinners to respond to the Gospel.[57] The followers of Arminianism believe that this divine grace guides individuals towards repentance. As per Wesley's teachings, prevenient grace allows those not yet spiritually reborn to recognize God's presence, take accountability for their wrongdoings, strive for righteousness, and rely on Christ for their redemption. He explains repentance in two phases. The first stage occurs during conversion when one acknowledges being an individual, feels remorseful

---

[54] Bruce A. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation (Foundations of Evangelical Theology)*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 36.

[55] Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation,* 238.

[56] Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 238.

[57] Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 239.

for transgressions, and humbly recognizes their spiritual poverty. The subsequent stage takes place post-conversion and involves a realization of remaining sins, feelings of inadequacy, and dependency.[58] Wesley's approach to repentance is helpful in both understanding and teaching others in my context to understand repentance. Repentance is an active part of the process of forgiveness. Wesley points out the fact that the knowledge of true repentance is learned from the point of the conversion of those who are called the children of God.[59]

God's emphasis on the importance of repentance is evident in the New Testament. The theme of repentance is prominent in the Gospel's beginning and end. In Luke 1:16, Gabriel states that John the Baptist will guide individuals from Israel toward God, echoing the call for repentance found in the Old Testament. Jesus tells his disciples that repentance and pardon for sins will be proclaimed in his name to people from all nations (Luke 24:47). It is apparent at this point that there is an imbalance in relationships—the role of the one seeking forgiveness differs significantly from that of the forgiver. These imbalances suggest that one person's actions can shape another's responsibilities. However, things become more intricate when I consider how I connect with my past with events preceding my birth.[60]

In the last petition of the Lord's Prayer, Jesus urged his followers to pray for deliverance from evil (Matt. 6:13). To pray for God's deliverance is central to what it means to practice repentance (Heb. 6:1), which is the first of the basic teachings of

---

[58] Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 240.

[59] Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation,* 240.

[60] Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 241.

Christ. When Jesus began his ministry, he called people to repent and believe in the good news that the reign of God was on the way (Mk.1:14–15; Matt. 4:17). The apostles taught those who wanted to become followers of Jesus that they must show signs of repentance before being baptized (Acts 2:38). It makes sense, then, that repentance is the first principle listed in the fundamental teaching of Christ (Heb. 6:1). It means to have a change of mind. It means to have a turn in direction. It imagines a radically altered way of seeing life so that you no longer place yourself at the center of things. It requires a turning or reorientation so that your attention focuses on God's direction. In this sense, repentance is a deliberate openness to the sort of change Jesus described when he said, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23).[61]

Reconciliation and Relationship

Reconciliation is the restoration of relationships and peace after there has been stress or strain. Reconciliation is the building of a relationship. God, in his relationship with humanity, seeks to remove those things that disturb relationships and peace. The death of Christ signified God's redemptive plan for mankind through the process of reconciliation. Mankind, through Christ, was restored in the relationship God once had with Adam in the garden. God's response to reconciliation to the world speaks to "God's initial change of heart towards sinners."[62]

---

[61] Curtis W. Freeman, *Pilgrim Letters: Instruction in the Basic Teaching of Christ* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2021), 12.

[62] Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Reconciliation," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1823–1824.

Through the selfless sacrifice of Christ, God's heart towards both sinner and sin has been restored. The point of the reconciliation is that God, for Christ's sake, now feels toward sinners as though they had never offended him. Reconciliation was completed once Christ demonstrated his sacrificial love for all mankind. Whatever caused the disruption in the peace of God is forgiven.[63]

God's idea of community is accomplished through the process of forgiveness and reconciliation, both of which are accomplished over time. The members of New Home Church will benefit from the process of forgiveness and reconciliation by considering their place in the social setting, in their case, the church or community of God. God's desire for a reconciled people delves into the person and social context of his people. Human beings exist as social entities, which leads to numerous social relationships and obligations when we engage with our surroundings through our individual selves. The problems of the world exist primarily because humans need to relate to each other and to other groups and societies and environments and all forms of life on Earth.[64] Howard Thurman wrote many books about the human experience and the need for relatedness among human beings. He writes in his book, *The Search for Common Ground*:

> The paradox of conscious life is the ultimate issue here. On the one hand is the absolute necessity for the declaration that states unequivocally the uniqueness of the private life, the awful sense of being an isolate, independent and alone, the great urgency to savor one's personal flavor – to stand over against all the rest of life in contained affirmation. While on the other hand is the necessity to feel oneself as a primary part of all life, sharing at every level of awareness a dependence upon the same elements in nature, caught up in the ceaseless rhythm

---

[63] Elwell and Beitzel, "Reconciliation," 1823–1824.

[64] Jacob Gordon Robinson, *The Theo-Ethics of Howard Thurman: Reconciliation and Beyond*," (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University, 2018), 13, http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/theo-ethics-howard-thurman-reconciliation-beyond/docview/2211175692/se-2.

> of living and dying, with no final immunity against a common fate that finds and holds all living things.[65]

Thurman's perspective on human relatedness stems from these issues prevalent in society and the church, and it is important to note that Thurman did not see these issues as simply one individual interacting with another. In the human need and desire to relate to other both privately and publicly, we find that relationship is key in the process of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Chris Rice in his book, *Reconciling All Things*, teaches that, "even for God, reconciliation is not an event or an achievement, but a journey from old to new."[66] He further states that in scripture, the specifics of this journey, God is not calling us to simply affirm a list of abstract beliefs but to embark on an adventure. If this journey calls for great skillfulness and discipline, then the vital skill required is memory. When Christians remember, we are able to explore the story of God's involvement with the world and draw on that story to locate and understand what is going on at any particular time within that story. This is what makes scripture indispensable to the Christian journey of reconciliation.

Campolo and Battle, in their book, *The Enslaved Church*, speak to the unanswered questions concerning the effect of racial bias and racism in the church. The book addresses human behavior and sociological concepts from a racial perspective. The authors point out that the great challenge in the church is addressing the challenges that occur due to personal and racial biases. The authors teach that Christianity has been

---

[65] Howard Thurman, *The Search for Common Ground: An Inquiry into the Basis of Man's Experience of Community* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1986), xiv.

[66] Chris Rice and Emmanuel Katongole, *Reconciling All Things* (Nashville, TN: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 49.

deeply compromised by its participation in the culture of racism.[67] Recovering the cultural roots of the black community is vital to that community as a whole. Campolo addresses the views of James Cones in that intellectual black thought is not equal to the same white theological thought because the lack of church is the oppressed or enslaved church. Racism is a direct violation of the principles of forgiveness and reconciliation. According to Campolo and Battle, their perspective on reconciliation is centered around the fact that through the cross-cultural experiences we have in life, we learn more ways how those who are different will still find their destiny. Reconciliation is not always found in the familiar concepts of personality and culture but also in the differences of those of other cultures and races.[68]

Relational Theology

What is Relational Theology? Thomas Jay Oord describes relational theology as the interrelatedness between God and his creation and between those who belong to the community God created. Oord believes the biblical description of God's activities and nature describes a relational God and his interrelatedness to his creation. Initially, the God who values relationships encouraged creatures to engage in activities and bring forth life. The interactions between God and Adam and Eve illustrate an aspect of God. From the start, God guides, anticipates, and interacts with creatures in all endeavors. Oord characterizes God's connection with creation as based on covenants. Through making covenants, God showcases nature. When faced with behavior, it stirs anger in God due to

---

[67] Anthony Campolo and Michael Battle, *The Church Enslaved: A Spirituality of Racial Reconciliation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 35.

[68] Campolo and Butler, *The Enslaved Church*, 79.

the disruption of this relationship. However, positive responses and continual relationships deepen the friendship between God and creatures. Authors highlight that a loving and steadfast God never abandons the relationship He starts and endeavors to nurture it.[69]

Since forgiveness and reconciliation are fundamental to my faith, I find it reassuring to agree with Oords' view that God is relational. Jesus teaches us to see God as our Abba (Father), emphasizing a relationship. God calls us to engage in a loving bond with others, something Jesus refers to as the commandment. He reflects on ideas found in the Old Testament regarding the importance of loving connections. Christians are advised to demonstrate love towards both those who share their beliefs and those who do not, as, towards friends, foes, family members, and individuals they have not yet met.[70]

Relational theology stands out for its perspective on God's interaction with creation. At its heart, this theological approach emphasizes two concepts: the involvement of God in influencing creatures and the reciprocal impact of creatures on God. Of remaining distant, God is portrayed as engaged and connected in relationships with others. This dynamic interplay between God and creation is crucial as it highlights the existing influence. Adherents of theology often align with theological beliefs, such as emphasizing love as God's primary attribute and promoting the importance of loving others. They also view God's interactions within the Trinity. Recognize Jesus Christ as the representation of God's relational love.[71]

---

[69] Thomas J. Oord, Brian Montgomery, and Karen S. Winslow, *Relational Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 7-8.

[70] Oord, Montgomery, and Winslow, *Relational Theology*, 7-8.

[71] Oord, Montgomery, and Winslow, *Relational Theology*, 8.

Christ in Relational Theology

In the book *Relational Theology*, R. Larry Shelton contributes to the person and work of Christ in relational theology. Shelton discusses how humans extensively relied on the life-giving essence of the Spirit of God, known as the Giver of Life. He mentions that with the arrival of Jesus from Nazareth, God's plan for salvation started to unfold. In the tale of the Holy Spirit bringing forth life in Mary's womb, it is highlighted that just as the Spirit once worked alongside Adam to create Eve, now it collaborates with a woman named Mary to bring about a new beginning through baby Jesus. Shelton states that God, who initially brought creation, again infuses humanity with life and that this Life Giver also establishes a connection with humanity through Jesus' conception.[72] The Creator, who breathed life into the man symbolically, now breathes life into humanity through an archetypal first woman. In Jesus' birth, the Word that created everything becomes in Christ, the Word that sustains life. As Christ embodies existence like an Adam—choosing obedience over disobedience paves the way for a renewed closeness with the origin of life.[73]

Jesus did not just exist as a human; he also shared teachings on how humans should lead their lives. His teachings on wisdom, love, and following God will showcase a vision of humanity living in harmony with God as originally intended. The tale of Adams's fall illustrates humanity's decision to distance themselves from their source of life (Gen. 3:1-24). The story of Adam and Eve defying God's instruction not to consume from the tree represents mankind's defiance. People were designed to have a bond with

---

[72] Oord, Montgomery, and Winslow, *Relational Theology*, 17.

[73] Oord, Montgomery, and Winslow, *Relational Theology*, 17-18.

God, recognize their identity in God's likeness, and uphold that relationship with Him. Yet humanity opted for autonomy and self-reliance of depending on the Creator, turning away from living and steadfast connections as the essence of life.[74] This separation from the source of life led to a decline that affected the covenant between humans and God and damaged the environment and human nature relations. Christ's purpose was to embody a beginning to Adam (Rom. 4 and 5). Christ works to renew the bond between humanity and its Creator. Through Christ, we rediscover that salvation means reestablishing a connection with God. Christ aimed to understand and engage with humanity during his time on Earth by taking on form.[75]

In his book titled *The Relational Theology of James E. Loder*, Kenneth E. Kovacs discusses the topic of suffering. Hofmann's focus on anthropology and subsequent interest in psychology led him to explore the essence of pain and seek ways to alleviate it. This seems to be at the core of Hofmann's concerns. He believed the Christian faith offers solutions to this issue through church ministry. However, Hofmann also noted a crisis within the church, pinpointing the ministry's essence as a problem; "The essential question is whether we have been slow in recognizing the power of our faith and thus ineffective, in our ministry."[76]

Kovacs writes about Hofmann's view that the church is not fully helping people by focusing on needs instead of exploring the deeper purpose of life through a spiritual lens. He criticizes the church during the 1960s for being too comfortable in living,

---

[74] Oord, Montgomery, and Winslow, *Relational Theology*, 20.

[75] Oord, Montgomery, and Winslow, *Relational Theology*, 21.

[76] Kenneth E. Kovacs, *The Relational Theology of James E. Loder: Encounter and Conviction* (New York, NY: Peter Lang AG International Academic Publishers, 2011), 39.

prioritizing psychoanalysis and pop psychology over true theological principles. Thus, Hofmann writes:

> The church has sheepishly followed the withdrawal of the human being from critical leadership in commerce and industry into a suburban escape where it can soothe its painful loss of self-confidence. The sermons and the counseling sessions of our contemporary pastors are full of petty trivialities that have to be blown up into disproportionate problems because we are neither willing to face our real problems nor have we felt the presence of any resources to deal with our profound predicament. The minister, lacking such resources, turns in his bankruptcy to psychologically phrased sermons and psychologized counseling techniques. It is disastrous that the Christian church should so enviously have borrowed — and without any critical judgment — the psychiatric and psychological insights and methods which, in themselves, are merely the result of our inability to tackle our problem in the broader context in which they have arisen. Because of their immoderate dependence on psychiatry and psychology, the churches have been driven to consider the individual instead of the community as a whole, the latter being, in fact, their proper function. The human being, therefore, finds nothing but his irreversible dependence, without knowing what he can depend on to regain his dignity and active forcefulness in dealing with his life situation.[77]

Kovacs suggests that Hofmann follows Loder's idea of analogia spiritus, emphasizing the interconnectedness of life shaped by the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the human spirit. Hofmann suggests that "Communion" occurs when a person recognizes the significance of their existence as a result of God's breath of life, within the understanding that God not only grants life but also resides within them. This realization, brought about by God's intervention through the Holy Spirit, is not an instinctual awakening in man's self-awareness; instead, it is his encounter with God's specific life-giving purpose. The true essence of this concept is vividly portrayed in the "life, death, and rebirth of Jesus Christ, " symbolizing God's purpose for life.[78]

---

[77] Kovacs, *Relational Theology of James Loder*, 40.

[78] Kovacs, *Relational Theology of James Loder*, 42.

The Holy Spirit in Relational Theology

Following God's resurrection of Jesus, the Holy Spirit became a presence within the community. From the beginning, this growing community highlighted the value of interconnectedness. As members of the Church, they dined together, shared their belongings, worshipped and prayed collectively, and partook in communion as a group. Christians set out as the Church on a journey of expressing love through relationships.[79]

In his book *Relational Theology,* Amos Yong emphasizes the significance of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit within theology. He discusses the dimensions of the nature of the Holy Spirit, including its presence in the loving Trinitarian essence of God, its role in God's interaction with the world, its influence on the fabric of existence itself, and its contribution to the ultimate reunion between the world and God.[80] Yong discusses the concept of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in detail. He highlights that comprehending the role of the Spirit can be intricate and open to interpretation. However, notable theologians in the church, such as St. Augustine and Richard of St. Victor, have suggested that the Spirit represents the loving connection between the Father and the Son. This perspective invites us to consider the Spirit as a connection within the depths of existence. The Gospel stories hint at this dynamic during Jesus' baptism, where the Spirit appears symbolically as a dove descending upon Jesus while hearing the Father's voice affirming, "This is my Son, in whom I am well pleased."[81]

---

[79] Oord, Montgomery, and Winslow, *Relational Theology*, 21.

[80] Oord, Montgomery, and Winslow, *Relational Theology*, 22.

[81] Oord, Montgomery, and Winslow, *Relational Theology*, 22-23.

Yong suggests that when the Spirit plays a role in God's life, it also holds significance in God's connection with the world. Early Christian thinkers such as Irenaeus believed that the Father fashioned the globe using his hands: the Word and the Spirit. While the Word structures creation and its inhabitants, the Spirit serves as a force that injects innovation into the fabric of existence. He writes that the Spirit, often likened to God's breath, moved over the Earth, and vitality imbued all living beings, including humans. This divine breath sustains life and propels time on a scale. Moreover, the Spirit fosters relationships and connections beyond its role in nature and biology. Human experiences encompass social dimensions that extend beyond biological functions.[82] These ideas highlight the importance of connections that distinguish humans from living beings. No one exists in isolation; we derive meaning, satisfaction, and significance through our interactions with one another, united by a shared origin. Yong elaborates that the creative force in our lives also embodies the essence of salvation and our unity in Christ. Those who acknowledge Jesus as the chosen Savior, empowered by the Spirit to initiate God's plan, are likewise bestowed with the divine Spirit as he was.[83]

Yong's view is that in a world of challenges, the connections between people have been strained, leading to a sense of disconnection from oneself, others, and nature. However, God's work of redemption focuses on mending these broken bonds by bringing harmony to our hearts, fostering human unity, and restoring balance between humans and the world. How does the Spirit accomplish this? Initially, it was done by empowering Jesus from Nazareth to introduce the kingdom of God. Subsequently, by being poured out

---

[82] Oord, Montgomery, and Winslow, *Relational Theology*, 24.

[83] Oord, Montgomery, and Winslow, *Relational Theology*, 26.

on all people and residing within them, infusing their hearts with love. He further writes how this transformation enables individuals to extend that love to others. Ultimately, Yong feels that the same Spirit that changes our animosity into affection is also the force behind Pentecost's empowering message of love dissemination. This Spirit equips us to demonstrate the power of love wide. The redemptive influence of this Spirit is initiated through Christ. Shared with the world during Pentecost is what Jesus' followers referred to as the Spirit, marking an era (Acts 2:17).[84]

The Spirit acts as a connection between our life in Christ and the future completeness of His kingdom. Through the Spirit, we exist both in the present and in anticipation of what is to come, living in the realm of Christ's kingdom and eagerly awaiting its realization. The Spirit empowers us to carry out kingdom work now and guides us in praying for God’s kingdom. Essentially, the Spirit links our state, marked by the redemption process, with God's ultimate plan for a renewed creation.[85]

Through Romans chapter five believers receive the Spirit as the future aspect of peace with God, which results from their reconciliation to God through Christ (Rom. 5:10-11). The Spirit enables divine love to fill our hearts, which maintains our connection to God and protects us from every possible separation from his love. Through the Spirit, we experience the reality of reconciliation, which God established through Christ's death and resurrection. The Spirit functions as the connection to Christ's past death while

---

[84] Oord, Montgomery, and Winslow, *Relational Theology*, 23.

[85] Oord, Montgomery, and Winslow, *Relational Theology*, 23.

serving as the channel for our present godly relationship and as the active manifestation of complete relationship perfection in the future eschaton.[86]

Conclusion

Forgiveness and reconciliation are essential in the communal lives of God's people. This concept is both Christological and ecclesiological. Throughout the New Testament, forgiveness and reconciliation are key principles for the Christian journey. Embodying forgiveness allows believers to put off Jesus Christ so that Christ lives out forgiveness and reconciliation through the individual. The power to forgive then comes from the power of Christ. Believers learn the practicality of forgiveness and reconciliation through the teachings of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Repentance is also an intricate part of the process of forgiveness and reconciliation. While every offense does not always lead to reconciliation when the goal is reconciliation, the absence of repentance allows the offended to make peace within if the offender is absent or unwilling to repent. As we learned from our exploration of the theology of repentance, God requires repentance from his creation and among his creation. God is relational and desires community among his people; therefore, it is safe to say that if repentance is a significant part of humankind's reconciliation with him, it is also significant to our relationship with each other.

God is a relational God. He desires his people to be relational people. Throughout the Bible, we see God's relational heart to his people and his desire for his people to be relational with one another. Although there are several examples of this being true

[86] Gunton, *The Theology of Reconciliation*, 27.

throughout the word of God, there is one verse that best fits the summary of God's relational being and desire. "He said to them, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:37-40).

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

As demonstrated in the biblical chapter, a passage is examined that illustrates the positive impact forgiveness and reconciliation can have in the lives of those who seek peace of mind and heart with their brothers. The brother's family bond was torn and separated for many years because of offense. This family had suffered for a long time, not knowing the true fate of a brother they had manipulated and sold into what they felt was his demise. The brother that was hurt had moved on to fulfill the life God had shown him would be fulfilled. Both the perpetrators of the offense and the ones who were offended were reconciled, the brothers repented, and forgiveness was granted. The process of forgiveness made it possible for these brothers to be at peace within and with each other, as well as to reconcile as a family. Forgiveness heals both the offended and often the one who offends. Forgiveness is God’s plan to bring healing and peace of mind after hurt occurs. Forgiveness makes it possible to reconcile and be at peace with others, bringing unity among believers. This peaceful interaction between these long-lost brothers demonstrates the God-given power one has when repentance meets forgiveness, which brings about peace and reconciliation.

In the historical chapter, we witnessed a churchman who was displeased with the direction the church was headed and the awful outcome of the hurt within the church's

ranks can have on an individual. He found the courage to state his displeasure in a letter that caused the entire church to excommunicate him from its ranks. Instead of retaliating and furthering the damage already done, the churchman takes it upon himself to leave well enough alone and move on within his theological convictions. In doing so, he was at peace with God's direction. The churchman finds peace within by bringing together those who are like-minded and seeking the same peace from a theological stance he made that was a significant part of the protestant exodus from Catholicism. He found reconciliation among those who felt the same as he did but did not bear the call to write the letter that changed the theological course of life for so many. We also met another churchman who suffered church hurt in principle due to racism in the church culture of the predominately white church that he and other African Americans attended. Once he and the others suffered the undeniable pain of prejudice and racism in the place of worship, he too decided to find peace of heart and mind outside of that skewed church environment among others who were like-minded. The place of forgiveness for both gentlemen was to release the point of their pain imposed upon them by others so that God could use them in ways that would change the world and reshape the experiences of so many.

Theologically, persons must be able to embody the relational principles laid out by God’s desire for community. When broken by hurtful events, the broken and the perpetrator of the brokenness, although differently, must respond to God’s call to reconcile the differences that lay between both people. To meet true peace and reconciliation, the perpetrator of the pain must seek God and those who were hurt for forgiveness through repentance or apology. If persons are to embody God’s relational desire for community, they must rid themselves of self-pride and allow God to live

through them in love for self and neighbor. In doing so, the relationship between believers becomes more meaningful than one's agenda or personal beliefs. True forgiveness requires believers to walk in true repentance, which brings healing and reconciliation to the family or community of God.

Leaders and laity alike must learn the importance of divine community and God's desire for a clean slate between believers. The mission and ministry of God on which God has placed his people require them to live a life of peace one with another. God requires his creation to live in harmony with each other. To live in harmony, the community of God should be at peace, forgiving one another, and united in Christ.

At New Home AME Zion Church, leadership and laity are subjected to annual appointments that often threaten the relational continuity of the membership. Family connections seem to be leaned upon more than spiritual connections, which hinders God's overall plan for that church family within the new home community. The AME Zion denomination has an Episcopal form of government and an itinerate minister model that sometimes causes congregants to hesitate to participate in the vision of the appointed pastor. Subsequently, each year, the church also goes through the potential of leadership changes within its ranks. Over time, this has caused some mistrust within the church culture. Mistrust has led to several instances of hurt among the parishioners, some of whom have never undergone the proper therapeutic experience to help them identify and adequately deal with issues of disagreement, mistrust, and hurt. As stated in my ministry focus, one of the negative connotations of having such a close-knit family church environment is that families often become clannish and exclusive of other giftings of a church family.

This chapter will explore therapeutic models of forgiveness and ways the reader can rid themselves of the mental and emotional anguish of unforgiveness. Unforgiveness overshadows the possibility of experiencing true inner peace. Mental and spiritual unrest is directly tied to one's ability to discover inner peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Leaders and laity alike must learn to embrace God's concept of kingdom or community by not allowing unforgiveness to become divisive while working together. People often shun away from adequately dealing with the things that have hurt them. Without the proper self-care needed to rid one's mind and heart of those things that represent the pains of their past, people will continue a failed attempt to accomplish a mission with others without dealing with unforgiveness and division among them. This project seeks to raise awareness of how unforgiveness has impeded the lives of those who seek peace through forgiveness and reconciliation. New Home Church's past experiences created a level of hurt that kept the members from forgiving themselves and each other. Unforgiveness has overshadowed individual inner peace, and there is mistrust among parishioners and leaders that must be addressed before the church can reach spiritual maturity.

Therefore, the hypothesis of this project is if the members of New Home AME Zion Church understand the effects of unforgiveness, then they will be able to understand the value of forgiveness and how to demonstrate peace within and peace with others to become more spiritually mature and build the community of God through the ministry of reconciliation.

Unless the parishioners of New Home Church and abroad learn the overwhelming detriment of unforgiveness, they will unfortunately never realize the remarkable benefits

of forgiveness. Worthington and Wade, individuals in the fields of psychology and forgiveness, posit that unforgiveness and forgiveness are entities. According to their studies, it is suggested that forgiveness can only be achieved after experiencing unforgiveness. Yet, there are methods to diminish feelings of unforgiveness, with forgiveness being one of them.[1] These noted figures in the field emphasized how detrimental unforgiveness can be among a collection of people and the importance of replacing unforgiveness with the only thing that counteracts it mentally, which is forgiveness. Forgiveness is vital to the mental health of all who have experienced circumstances that resulted in hurt. Forgiveness and unforgiveness do not constantly occur in more extreme examples, such as an offender dying after an offense has occurred. In those cases, the death of the offender cannot warrant an act of either unforgiveness or forgiveness due to the absence of one of the parties involved. Worthington and Wade suggest that forgiveness diminishes unforgiveness distinctly from unforgiveness in everyday relations. Unforgiveness is described as a "feeling that includes resentment, bitterness and possibly hatred well, as the intentional avoidance or retaliation, against someone who has wronged you.[2] Forgiveness is when a person decides internally whether not to let go of resentment and tries to make amends, with the person who wronged them if it's safe, wise, and feasible.

[1] E. L. Worthington, Jr., and N. G. Wade, "The Psychology of Unforgiveness and Forgiveness and Implications for Clinical Practice," *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 18 (1999): 385.

[2] Worthington, Jr., and Wade, "The Psychology of Unforgiveness and Forgiveness and Implications for Clinical Practice," 386.

The Field of Psychology and Social Psychology

In 1989, the scientific community saw a published study that delved into forgiveness between individuals. It explored how children, teenagers, and young adults perceived forgiveness and what factors played a role in making them more inclined to forgive. Prior to this research, studies primarily focused on apologies or individuals seeking forgiveness rather than the act of people forgiving each other.[3]

The concept of Social Psychology is fundamental to a successful group dynamic. Psychology's study of social behavior is significant for many different reasons. It enables us to comprehend how societal expectations and norms influence individual behavior, how group dynamics affect judgments, and how interpersonal relationships impact mental and physical health. Insights from social behavior research can also guide interventions against social problems like conflict, violence, prejudice, and discrimination. The field of psychology focuses on how we engage and connect with others. Certain studies in psychology explore our emotions, thoughts, and behaviors towards individuals we come across. Additionally, research delves into analyzing the dynamics of groups to comprehend group behavior.[4]

The way most people see psychology is how they view the field of psychology in general. A key aspect of psychology focuses on how we perceive and respond to the individuals we interact with. In our interactions, like in other aspects of our mental

---

[3] Robert Enright, "Reflecting on Thirty Years of Forgiveness Science: What were the Developments in this Field and Where is it Headed Next?" Psychology Today, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-forgiving-life/201904/reflecting-30-years-forgiveness-science.

[4] Peter Wright and Hamish Macleod, *Get Set for Psychology* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 83–94, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g0b0ht.10.

processes, our brains excel at processing a large amount of information quickly to make decisions. This means that we often rely on heuristics or mental shortcuts in our thinking (as explained in Chapter five) than strict logic. It also implies that our judgments are influenced by a set of assumptions that may be relevant in situations, making us susceptible to bias. In fact, it could be argued that every social judgment includes some level of bias since we form opinions about how others might behave towards us based on information.

The field of psychology explores how an individual's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are influenced when in the company of others. It delves into the factors that shape interactions.[5] One's interactions, relationships, and group dynamics are shaped by social behavior, which is the bedrock of human society. The intricate interplay of social behaviors determines the arrangement and operation of these structures, from families to entire nations. It is essential to understand social behavior in psychology to understand how people behave in social situations, why they behave that way, and how these behaviors can be changed or manipulated. Social groups are embedded into the fabric of the community.[6]

Forgiveness, according to Khoddam, plays a role in all types of relationships, whether or not. We often tend to believe that others perceive life the way we do. Yet the reality is that there are perspectives as there are individuals in this world. When we fail to grasp people's viewpoints, it can lead to misunderstandings, conflict, animosity, and

---

[5] Author Unknown, *Principles of Social Psychology* (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, 2015).

[6] N. Sam, "Social Psychology," Psychology Dictionary Professional Reference, https://psychologydictionary.org/social-psychology/.

emotional detachment. However, embracing forgiveness in our relationships can serve as a bridge to overcome these barriers.[7] All behavior that occurs in a social setting, considering interactions between people and groups, is referred to as social behavior in psychology. This broad field covers a variety of phenomena, such as altruism and aggression, love and hate, conformity and disobedience, and cooperation and competition.[8]

Forgiveness Theory

Forgiveness has long been an aspect of healing and reconciling relationships among people within traditions dating back to ancient times.[9] Lately, therapists have shown interest in utilizing forgiveness as a way to assist families and individuals in starting troubled relationships, addressing longstanding issues, and letting go of anger and resentment.[10] Worthington discusses the nature of forgiveness and the factors that influence people's ability to forgive. Philosophers, theologians, psychologists and everyday individuals can form their perspectives on what forgiveness entails. Like individuals exploring an elephant, they may confidently believe they have grasped the

[7] Rubin Khoddam, "The Psychology of Forgiveness: A How-To Guide on the Science Behind Learning to Forgive," Psychology Today, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-addiction-connection/201409/the-psychology-forgiveness.

[8] N. Sam, Social Psychology, Psychology Dictionary Professional Reference, https://psychologydictionary.org/social-psychology/.

[9] Terry D. Hargrave and James N. Sells, "The Development of a Forgiveness Scale," *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 23, no. 1 (1997): 41–62.

[10] Hargrave and Sells, "The Development of a Forgiveness Scale," 41.

truth and provide arguments to validate their beliefs. It is important for individuals to reflect on whether they have considered all the complexities involved in forgiveness.[11]

Forgiving someone can be a journey for individuals. When we face betrayal, pain, and misunderstandings that make forgiveness challenging, it's normal to experience those emotions. Forgiveness is closely linked to finding peace. It involves addressing the feelings before reaching a point of forgiveness. It's important for individuals to embrace the process of forgiveness by taking time to understand and acknowledge how betrayal has affected them. While some may find it easy to forgive quickly, others may need time. Forgiveness isn't about holding onto anger or resentment; it's about accepting things as they are, without judgment or distorted perspectives.

Worthington explains the two components of forgiving as interpersonal and intrapersonal. In his book *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Theory and Application*, Worthington describes the process of forgiveness as having several components:

1. Forgiveness is not all-in-one but involves different processes, occurring differently depending on the relationship. For instance, we tend to pardon individuals whom we are not acquainted with in a manner compared to our close ones who betray our trust. The consequences of our forgiveness decisions differ from how we perceive the act of forgiving.
2. Forgiveness implies evolving with time. Given the myriad of experiences that unfold over time, it can be challenging to determine if we have truly forgiven completely and permanently.
3. Forgiveness is related to perceived injustice.
4. Emotional forgiveness is the primary barometer of change despite this complexity.
5. Emotional forgiveness happens when negative, unforgiving, and stressful emotions are replaced with feelings towards others.[12]

---

[11] Robert Enright, "Reflecting on Thirty Years of Forgiveness Science: What were the Developments in this Field and Where is it Headed Next?" Psychology Today, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-forgiving-life/201904/reflecting-30-years-forgiveness-science.

[12] Everett L. Worthington, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Theory and Application* (New York, NY: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2006), 17.

Interpersonal Models of Forgiveness

Baumeister identified two aspects of forgiveness: the personal and the relational. The personal aspect involves one's ability to forgive oneself or not. On the other hand, the relational aspect pertains to expressing forgiveness towards someone who has wronged you. There are four scenarios that can unfold in this context. In the scenario, there is a lack of relational forgiveness, with no communication between the victim and the transgressor. Silent forgiveness occurs when the victim internally forgives. Does not vocalize it. This form of forgiveness can bring peace to the victim. May also lead to unresolved issues with the transgressor. Hollow forgiveness occurs when a victim outwardly expresses forgiveness without feeling it due to societal expectations. This type of forgiveness can be detrimental to the victim as it may not address underlying emotions. Lastly, full forgiveness involves both external expressions of forgiveness towards the transgressor, resulting in benefits for both parties involved.[13]

Hargraves's Four Stations of Forgiveness

Hargrave and Sells pointed out that forgiveness is driven by exoneration and entitlement. They outlined four stages of forgiveness that I will delve into. Exonerating is described as the act of a person who has been wronged or hurt to release the burden of blame from the person who caused the harm, stating that exoneration comes through insight and understanding. Insight involves a person's ability to objectively analyze the sources of family pain that have led to relationship issues. By recognizing these sources and interactions causing pain, one gains the ability to interrupt them and prevent harm in

[13] Worthington, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, 18.

future relationships. Understanding requires empathizing with the perspective, limitations, growth, efforts, and intentions of the one who caused harm. This empathy leads to acknowledging the fallibility of that individual without absolving them of responsibility for their actions. With increased understanding comes a decrease in feelings of condemnation and blame towards the wrongdoer.[14]

Forgiveness involves the effort to rebuild love and trust in relationships, allowing both victims and wrongdoers to move past entitlement. The concept suggests that forgiveness, within families, can be categorized as either exoneration or genuine forgiveness, each placing expectations on the dynamic between the harmed individual and the one who caused harm.[15]

Forgiveness and exoneration are distinct in their requirements concerning responsibility for the wrongdoing that caused pain. Within a family context, achieving justice necessitates that the injured party reasonably holds the perpetrator accountable for the harm inflicted. The breach of trust in the relationship becomes apparent. Through forgiveness, the victim gains assurance that the wrongdoer acknowledges their role in causing harm and commits to behaving. This results in the restoration of trust and re-establishment of the relationship. According to Hargraves's model, forgiveness involves permitting compensation and engaging in an act of forgiveness. By allowing compensation, the victim supports the wrongdoer in rebuilding trust through actions.

---

[14] Worthington, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, 19.

[15] Hargrave and Sells, "The Development of a Forgiveness Scale," 19.

Through an act of forgiveness, both parties openly address the transgression and mutually agree to pursue a new loyal relationship.[16]

Hargrave suggests that forgiveness can be categorized into two parts: exonerating and forgiving. Exonerating involves gaining insight and understanding, while forgiving entails providing the chance for compensation and openly forgiving.

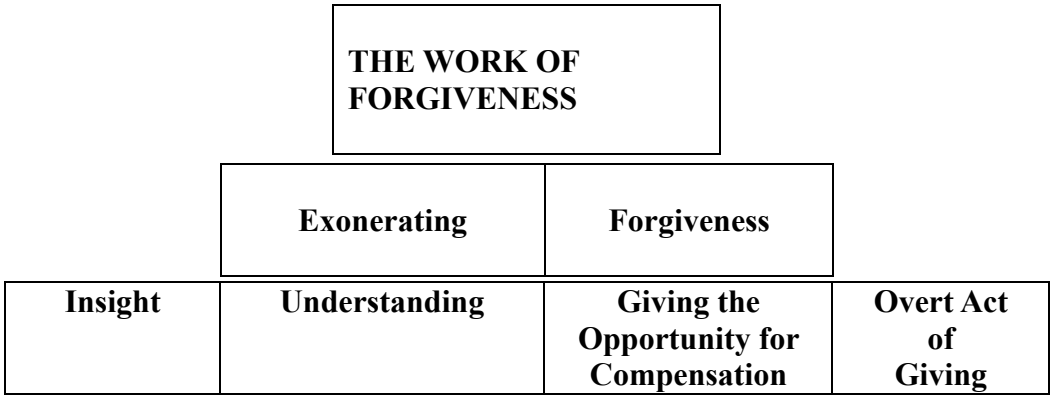


Figure 1: Hargraves' Four Stages of Forgiveness.[17]

Step one is, about identifying when something wrong has happened. Insight means being able to see how things happen and how harm is caused in relationships and stopping these patterns to prevent harm in the future. If someone has insight, they might feel lost when dealing with pain and struggle to talk about difficult situations or how to avoid them. On the other hand, if someone has a lot of insight, they can easily recognize pain. Know how to steer clear of distressing situations.[18]

[16] Hargrave and Sells, "The Development of a Forgiveness Scale," 44.

[17] Hargrave and Sells, "The Development of a Forgiveness Scale," 44.

[18] Hargrave and Sells, "The Development of a Forgiveness Scale," 45.

Step two is about comprehension. Comprehension means being able to empathize with the perspective boundaries, growth, endeavors, and motives of the individual responsible for causing harm in a relationship. Limited engagement with this concept would imply that the individual excessively faults either themselves or the offender without considering the context or situation. On the other hand, deep engagement with this concept would indicate that a person comprehensively grasps the circumstances for assigning accountability for relational decline.[19]

Step three involves offering the chance for reparation. Providing this opportunity entails engaging in interactions and establishing connections with the offender in a manner that doesn't alarm the victim and fosters connection. A lack of engagement in this area suggests that an individual sees maintaining ties with the offender as risky and experiences communication during interactions. On the other hand, strong involvement indicates that a person believes they can have a relationship with the offender based on trust and care and wishes to sustain that relationship in the run.[20]

Station four involves forgiving someone. Openly forgiving means being able to address relationship issues with the person who caused them and resolve any responsibility concerns for specific wrongdoings, leading to a restored and trustworthy relationship. Feeling less connected to this idea may suggest that a person sees themselves as ineffective in addressing and resolving relationship problems. On the other hand, feeling strongly about this concept may indicate that a person views themselves as

[19] Hargrave and Sells, “The Development of a Forgiveness Scale,” 45.

[20] Hargrave and Sells, “The Development of a Forgiveness Scale,” 46.

successful in discussing past issues with the other person, leading to increased trust between them.[21]

Intrapersonal Models of Forgiveness

In the interpersonal level of forgiveness, we learned of several types of forgiveness that are expressions of forgiveness toward the offender. These types of forgiveness can either be expressed or not expressed towards the offender. Intrapersonal models of forgiveness reflect an internal forgiveness or not. Worthington defines various kinds of interpersonal forgiveness in the following ways:

1. Unforgiveness is if the offended has no intrapersonal or interpersonal expression of forgiveness towards the offender.
2. Silent forgiveness occurs when a person feels forgiveness toward the perpetrator but does not express that feeling to the perpetrator. This type of forgiveness can be seen as beneficial to the offended, who can feel peace within but will hold the transgression over the offender's head.
3. Hollow forgiveness is when the victim does not feel forgiveness but expresses forgiveness to the offender. The victim often feels as though forgiveness is socially or culturally required. In this case, the victim has minimal benefit because he or she appears to have let the offender off the hook but still harbors negative feelings.
4. Full forgiveness is when internal forgiveness is expressed to the transgressor, benefitting both parties.[22]

A Classical Conditioning Model

In this model, Worthington likens a transgression to a stimulus that triggers pain. He says that the offense itself can be classically conditioned to the fear and anger of the victim. In this model, the victim's emotional response can be likened to an animal

[21] Hargrave and Sells, "The Development of a Forgiveness Scale," 46.

[22] Worthington, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, 18.

response to stimuli that trigger fear and anger. These responses could be to freeze, withdraw, avoid, or fight.[23] Worthing further explains that the same response could be triggered, even after forgiveness has been granted, if the victim is placed in one of four conditions: 1) a similar situation, 2) another pairing of the conditioned stimuli, 3) an act that reminds the victim of the original harm, or 4) another similar situation.[24]

Decision-Based Model

According to this model, Fredrick DiBlasio describes decision-based forgiveness as the act of releasing resentment and bitterness along with the desire for revenge.[25] DiBlasio mentions that the journey through pain and suffering doesn't always have an endpoint. He emphasizes the idea that while emotions and cognitive abilities are closely connected, one doesn't have to be dictated by the other. Forgiveness isn't something that always comes effortlessly; it often requires time and deliberation. In DiBlasio's perspective, forgiveness is more of a decision a choice whether to release or hold onto grievances. Individuals have the capacity to distinguish between feelings of resentment or bitterness and their underlying hurt or negative thoughts.[26] Ironically, those who have been wronged often find themselves adopting the traits of their perpetrators as they dwell on grudges, which can have effects on their physical well-being, emotional balance, mental acuity, behavioral reactions, and overall sense of spiritual fulfillment. Some

---

[23] Worthington, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, 19-20.

[24] Worthington, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, 21.

[25] Fredrick A. DiBlasio, "The Use of a Decision-Based Forgiveness Intervention Within Intergenerational Family Therapy," *Journal of Family Therapy* 20 (1998): 78-79.

[26] DiBlasio, "The Use of a Decision-Based Forgiveness Intervention Within Intergenerational Family Therapy," 78-79.

therapists suggest that allowing victims to acknowledge and work through their anger can be beneficial, as prematurely suppressing it may leave them feeling disempowered. Rather than rushing to eliminate anger, this approach encourages victims to reclaim their power by making decisions that foster harmonious relationships and inner peace and, for those who are religiously inclined, a sense of tranquility with a higher power.[27]

R. D. Enright sees forgiveness as a growth process in relation to Piaget's and Kohlberg's ideas about thinking and ethics.[28] Enright distinguishes between Kohlberg's concept of forgiveness and justice-based morality, highlighting that justice-based morality is perceived as a means to achieve fairness and equality. In contrast, forgiveness involves letting go of the need for justice. He states, "A forgiver knows that the wrongdoer has no right to compassion but is given nonetheless."[29]

Enright's stages of forgiveness construct parallel the six stages of Kohlberg's idea of justice:

1. Forgiveness borne out of a desire for revenge suggests that one can only truly forgive after experiencing the urge to seek vengeance, which reflects the depth of one's turmoil.
2. Restoration and forgiveness go hand in hand. Forgiveness is given to ease guilt or once what was lost has been restored.
3. Forgiveness is prompted by influence.
4. Forgiveness is often given when someone adheres to a standard or follows a belief.
5. Forgiveness is offered to promote unity and ensure interactions among people.
6. Forgiving someone is a way to show love. Hurtful actions don't change the commitment to love. Forgiveness keeps the door open for reconciliation.[30]

---

[27] DiBlasio, "The Use of a Decision-Based Forgiveness Intervention Within Intergenerational Family Therapy," 80.

[28] Sells, and Hargrave, "Forgiveness: A Review of the Theoretical and Empirical Literature," 26.

[29] Sells, and Hargrave, "Forgiveness: A Review of the Theoretical and Empirical Literature," 26.

[30] Sells, and Hargrave, "Forgiveness: A Review of the Theoretical and Empirical Literature," 27-28.

Enright distinguishes between justice and forgiveness, highlighting two paths to forgiveness. The first involves an apology that paves the way for forgiveness, mirroring Enright's stages of forgiveness rooted in Piaget's concept of give and take. The second path requires forgiveness before an apology, linked to Piaget's principle of give and take. In this scenario, forgiveness serves as a vehicle for reconciling and repairing the relationship.[31]

R.E.A.C.H. Model of Forgiveness

Worthing offers a widely used model for helping people forgive. This model is called R.E.A.C.H (Recall, Empathize, Altruistic, Commit, and Hold). He desires to teach people how to reach a place of forgiveness by using the word "reach" as an acronym.

1. Recall the hurt. When hurt, we often protect ourselves by suppressing the pain. Worthington teaches that to heal, one must face the fact that you have been hurt. The victim should not pursue revenge but rather be encouraged to forgive. In this stage, the victim should never dwell on their victimization but admit that something wrong has happened.
2. Show understanding for your partner by empathizing with them. Empathy involves stepping into the shoes of the person. During this phase, the person who was harmed should try to understand the emotions of the one who caused harm. One method suggested by Worthington is to imagine that the other person is seated in a chair across from you. He advises the individual who was harmed to address this figure as if they were present in that chair. The person who was harmed should express their feelings to the transgressor, then switch seats and respond as if they were in the transgressor's position. Engaging in this dialogue helps the person who was harmed gain insight into why they may have been wronged. This process fosters. Even if full empathy isn't achieved, it can lead to feelings of sympathy, compassion, or love, which aid in recovering from wounds. Empathy is one approach, for replacing emotions.
3. Offer forgiveness as an act of generosity. We've all experienced moments when we have hurt someone, be it a parent, teacher, or friend, and they choose to forgive us. In those instances, a burden was lifted off our shoulders. We felt motivated not to let down that forgiving individual by repeating our mistakes. By extending forgiveness without motives, you are bestowing upon others the

[31] Sells, and Hargrave, "Forgiveness: A Review of the Theoretical and Empirical Literature," 27.

compassionate gift that you received when forgiven for your own wrongdoings.

4. Commit. Once you have forgiven, write a note to yourself or publicly commit that forgiveness is granted. This helps your forgiveness last and is easier to hold on to. Worthington's rationale is that if a person does this publicly, to a friend, family member, or counselor, for example, they will be more likely to keep that commitment.
5. Keep forgiveness close. We jot down promises of commitment to remind ourselves when we may start doubting our act of forgiving. Sharing with others adds a sense of responsibility to our pledge. It's helpful to revisit our notes.[32]

Worthington states that people should give themselves time and consideration before tackling forgiveness and reconciliation. Three questions should be asked. How serious is the transgression? This question will allow the victim to separate the minor transgressions from the larger ones. The victim can then put off the transgressions that they consider significant until they have healed and are ready to address the issue. How raw is transgression? Worthington advises the individual to refrain from dwelling on wounds that are still fresh. Consider whether the individual you seek to forgive is currently part of your life or not. If the relationship is ongoing, there may be a reaction from the individual possibly perceived as retaliatory, adding complexity to the act of forgiveness. In cases where the person is no longer present in one's life, forgiveness becomes a matter of reflection and interpersonal dynamics.[33]

Conclusion

I hope that the members of my context will be able to process these interpersonal and intrapersonal forgiveness models fully. In this chapter, I have attempted to lay out the

[32] Worthington, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, 73.

[33] Worthington, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, 76-77.

responsibility of both the victim and the transgressor regarding the process of forgiveness. I desire that the leaders and congregants of the New Home Church will be able to successfully engage in the process of forgiveness to build a morally and spiritually safe environment to do God's work. Although many researchers have separated forgiveness from reconciliation, the two coincide and should be treated equally. God loves community, and his creation should always reach for forgiveness and reconciliation as its main relational goal.

As it pertains to reconciliation, there is a notable difference between the theological application and the interdisciplinary application. From a theological perspective, reconciliation is the goal for those who are citizens of the community or kingdom of God. From an interdisciplinary perspective, reconciliation is not the primary goal due to the individual process of the offended. God emphasizes forgiveness and reconciliation among believers as a command to maintain harmony throughout this process. Though not always achievable, reconciliation remains the theological goal. In the interdisciplinary context, both Worthington and Enright discuss this process as evolutionary, noting that reconciliation is not always the goal, depending on the individual's progress in their journey.

Reflecting on the discussion about forgiveness encompassing aspects of justice and morality, repairing relationships through reconciliation emerges as an outcome. Holding onto bitterness can take a toll on one's physical well-being. Individuals who are more inclined to forgive may have more nurturing circles. Forgiveness can pave the way for reconciliation, implying that highly forgiving people may be more successful in

mending relationships than those who struggle with forgiveness.[34] Teaching people to be forgiving relieves the stress and tension between the offender and the transgressor. The models discussed in this chapter show a clear connection between forgiveness and inner peace. Scientifically, in each of these indirect mechanisms, the relationships of forgiving people are likely to be better overall, with emotional steadiness being more characteristic of the relationship. Thus, less time is expected to be spent on negative emotional arousal. I hope and pray that this chapter has impressed upon the reader to be more in touch with their emotional response regulation. According to the Decision-Based model discussed earlier in this chapter, forgiveness is directly tied to an emotional response to the hostile actions of others. It is a choice to make wise decisions as it relates to their power to forgive. Realizing the power one has to forgive is freeing in every way. Forgiveness becomes the segway to peace within and peace with others.

[34] Everett L. Worthington Jr., and Michael Scherer, "Forgiveness is an Emotion-Focused Coping Strategy that can Reduce Health Risks and Promote Health Resilience: Theory, Review, and Hypotheses," *Psychology and Health* 19, no. 3 (2004): 398.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

Having examined the needs in my own life and ministry context, I reached the conclusion that there was a common need to address the ill effects of unforgiveness. My interest in the area developed as issues of unforgiveness in my own life were revealed in my spiritual autobiography. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the key theological theme of God's intent for his creation to live in a community together without separation and division due to unforgiveness. Through sharing the lived experiences of the fourteen participants in this study, the researcher hoped to gain insight into how they managed issues of unforgiveness. Drawing upon two main themes of research, the following research questions guided this study: 1. How did these participants manage the effects of unforgiveness? 2. How do they manage their own spiritual maturity when faced with hurt? This chapter presents the answers to those questions with (a) a summary of the learnings of the study, (b) a discussion of important points that emerged from the themes, and (c) recommendations for further research. The project began with a hypothesis: If the members of New Home AME Zion Church are taught about the effects of unforgiveness, then they will increase their willingness to forgive.

This study aimed to investigate the ill effects of unforgiveness on the lives of God's people. This investigation was done through the lens of four foundations (biblical,

historical, theological, and interdisciplinary). The foundational chapters of this project shaped my thoughts and ideas regarding the project proposal and implementation. Thus, I have concluded that the church is not aware of how unforgiveness has destroyed the tenets of faithful fellowship and relevant relationships among those who make up the community of God. The context is New Home A.M.E. Zion Church, a rural southern church found in the New Home Community of York, South Carolina.

The Methodist Church is an episcopal form of government that assigns pastors according to skill set and the needs of the local church. I was assigned to New Home Church as pastor five years ago. I immediately noticed several divisions among many of the parishioners. The church is a staple church within the community, after which it is named. Because of the location of the church, New Home church has the potential to grow beyond that of other churches in the area; however, the deep-rooted family culture of the church causes many people to lose faith in the fellowship and hinders the congregation from reaching its fullest potential.

To that end, many members do not participate in certain ministries or voluntarily ask to resign due to the strong bonds and family ties. Because family ties are so deep, parishioners have become territorial and clannish over the work of ministry in the church. It has become increasingly apparent, because of such behaviors, that feelings have been hurt, and unforgiveness has settled among many parishioners. This family of faith strongly believes that the work of ministry is imperative to the growth and development of a healthy church and community.

When I arrived at New Home Church, I was overwhelmed by the potential the church has for growth. The church sits on a main highway not far from the Steel Creek

side of Charlotte, North Carolina. Many of the parishioners live in Charlotte and bring a unique twist to the ministry concept at New Home Church. The underlying problem of unforgiveness hinders the forward progress of individual growth and maturity among parishioners and overall church growth and development of the church in the community. The members of the church have been in prayer about relief from family divisions due to past incidents. Unforgiveness and holding on to grudges plagued the overall mission and ministry of the church and caused the church to plateau in its successful approach to church and community ministry.

Since being assigned as pastor of New Home Church, I have worked closely with leaders and parishioners alike. The common theme of past issues has been etched into the cultural practicality of the church family. It has been an awesome task to attempt to amalgamate the individual family cultures together and to form one family or community in Christ. I took seriously the fact that the church had so much potential and could not fully reach its potential due to division caused by unforgiveness. It became my mission to assist New Home Church in becoming the community that God desires His people to be and to influence spiritual maturity among the parishioners.

After prayerfully considering the parishioners' spiritual immaturity and the need to overcome the ill effects of unforgiveness, the idea came to mind to research and study a way to assist the parishioners in attaining the spiritual maturity needed to overcome unforgiveness. After spending several years observing the parishioners' relationships and the clannish behaviors of certain family sects, the project herein developed was the best way to address the issues and bring them to the level of maturity that God desires his people to have.

Leaders and members of New Home African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church were trained in developing spiritual maturity in overcoming the effects of unforgiveness as the final project as required by the United Theological Seminary program. The topic of discussion was explored through the story of Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers for what they did to him as a result of their anger about his dream. Joesph and his brother are iconic in the sense they answer the age-old concern about how to overcome the hurt and pain of past experiences and reconcile beyond personal feelings. His brothers once held him responsible for a dream that God showed him, which in turn made them angry. Years passed and Joseph made it to the place God showed him in the dream. The leaders and members of New Home Church would be the subject of my research on forgiveness because they would glean from Joseph's level of spiritual maturity and be able to move from a place of cultural division to a kingdom community.

During my time as pastor at New Home Church, I have had the awesome opportunity to get to know the heart of the people and learned that they really do love God and each other. However, they desired to know how to do so apart from past hindrances. After my spiritual autobiography and an opportunity to self-reflect on issues of unforgiveness in my own life and facing the personal convictions that God allowed me to feel, I decided to embark on a research response to the problem I witnessed.

Problem

This project focuses on the impact of conflicts among the New Home community members. It is observed that lingering grudges and past issues have strained relationships among parishioners, leading to a lack of forgiveness. Moreover, it is noted that certain

individuals in leadership roles have used their positions to exert power and influence over others, resulting in divisions within the church community. The project does not attribute all instances of unforgiveness to any individual but aims to address the collective experiences of those affected within the church. This endeavor aims to provide guidance and support to church members who have been hurt within the community, helping them navigate processes that promote healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis for this project is that if the members of New Home AME Zion Church are taught about the effects of unforgiveness, they will increase their willingness to forgive. I was able to research and present to the project participants various ways that will contribute to their spiritual growth and maturity in forgiveness and, where possible, reconciliation.

The answer to gaining a better understanding of the process of forgiveness was embedded in the project questionnaires and discussion sessions regarding examples of the application of forgiveness. The project also sought to identify changes needed to assist the participants in identifying the things needed to dissipate the ills of unforgiveness in their lives. The research was done to inform the project on biblical examples of forgiveness and its application in the participants' everyday lives. Information from historical research provided additional insights into Martin Luther’s challenge to the Catholic Church and their decision to excommunicate his doctrinal challenge in his Ninety-Five Thesis. The theology of salvation is the embodiment of the process of forgiveness and reconciliation. Its principles are at the heart of the Christian belief that

God made the world as he saw fit, and his redemptive power rescued the same world from disorder and restored it to its proper place in fellowship with himself. The interdisciplinary perspective informed the project on best practices in the field of psychology, more specifically, social psychology and forgiveness theory. Social psychology is a fundamental part of both group dynamics and individual cases. It enables us to comprehend how societal expectations and norms influence individual behavior, how group dynamics affect judgments, and how interpersonal relationships impact mental and physical health. Insights from social behavior research can also guide interventions against social problems like conflict, violence, prejudice, and discrimination.

Methodology

This research used a qualitative research design to address the hypothesis. "Qualitative data tends to be open-ended without predetermined responses while quantitative data usually includes closed-ended responses such as found on questionnaires or psychological instruments."[1] This method was chosen due to the project's time constraints. The size of the sample population was also limited. Eight participants were selected for a focus group, which met for seven sessions. The sessions allowed time to collect pre- and post-surveys, discussion questions, and discussion-based journal entries.

A group of individuals that mirrors the ministry context were chosen for participation. This group consists of eight members. The participants are encouraged to

[1] John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018), 14.

join all worship services and Bible conversations throughout the project, attendance is not mandatory. Each participant in the project was a current consenting adult member of the New Home Church. The participants were a mixture of male and female who served in lay and leadership roles within the ministry. The project participants were willing participants with the understanding that they could discontinue participation at any time during the six sessions. In session one, after the Human Research Subject Consent Form was completed, participants of the focus group were reminded that I would be accessible to discuss any concerns during the project. The curriculum was administered by myself as a participant-observer.

Each session was sixty minutes and began with a prayer rendered by one of the participants, followed by a centering moment directed by the chosen Bible scripture for the session. The participants were asked to listen to the sermon of the week, which would coincide with the session each week. I guided the sermons and Bible discussions as pastor and project coordinator. The mid-week study sessions aligned with the sermon's focus on forgiveness and reconciliation, which was introduced during a sermon and further explored in the focus group session at our mid-week Bible Study. In these weekly sessions, I seized the opportunity to reinforce the core teachings of the sermon and address any questions the participants may have about those themes. In the centering moment, the participants read over the Bible verse from the sermon of the week. The centering moment led to the discussion for the session. Each centering moment focused on an aspect of biblical forgiveness. We discussed ways to apply these principles of forgiveness and reconciliation in the individual participant’s thoughts and behaviors.

My professional associates assisted me in the project development and in homing in on the actual, proven factors and characteristics from other schools of thought that contribute to the unforgiveness that results in broken relationships in a person's life. They helped me fine-tune the information and assignments that were used in each teaching module. They assisted me in identifying which methodology best applies to my final project and in recognizing the limitations inherent in tackling the underlying subject matter of this project.

This project was reviewed with my professional associates, and from that review, I assisted in developing the various assignments needed in each module. My professional associates also helped me with data interpretation on all data collected during the project implementation and assisted in forming the content of the modules that were used weekly. My context, peer associates, and I will actively implement the project. My peers provided support in managing the execution of the project. They helped to understand how the participants interact with the project components as part of our New Home community.

Additionally, they helped us stay connected to our ministry focus. I also relied on my colleagues to assist me in conveying information about forgiveness and repairing relationships with the participants. Furthermore, they played a role in recognizing and addressing the pain and suffering that our members may encounter during the project implementation. While this initiative aims to heal and support the participants, it is essential that they feel secure and respected throughout the process. The project is designed to allow each participant to navigate their struggles with hurt and reconciliation.

Participants shared their thoughts and reflections with the focus group. The first passage was Genesis 50:15-21- "You Meant it for My Bad, But God Meant It for My Good" (session one); Colossians 3:12-15 – "Bear With Me Please" (session two); Matthew 18:21-34 – "What Goes Around Comes Around" (session three); Matthew 6:14-15 – "Forgiving and Forgiven," (session four); 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 – "Given to Reconciliation," (session five); and Matthew 5:23-24 – "The Ministry of Reconciliation" (session six). The sessions started in week two of the project timeframe. In week one, the Participant Consent Form was explained, a general overview of the project's objectives and goals, and each participant completed a pre-survey.

Interview Questions

Table 1: Interview Questions

Interview Questions
1. How would you define forgiveness from a biblical perspective?
2. Describe the effects of unforgiveness based on your understanding of biblical expectations.
3. What correlation, if any, is there between unforgiveness and effective ministry as a Church?
4. How does reconciliation affect the overall local congregation's ability to do effective ministry?
5. What, if any, responsibility does local church members have to cultivate forgiveness within the local congregation or in the body of Christ?

The Interview Questions were designed to explore the participant's overall understanding of forgiveness as God sees it and to gauge the participant's understanding of the ill effects of unforgiveness. Measuring the correlation between unforgiveness and how it affects ministry shows the overall understanding of the disheartening outlook on

the local congregation. The participants were encouraged to think through these questions and to explore the purpose of forgiveness and the importance of community with the local church. Disunity among believers is a challenging hindrance to the ministry environment and parishioners' relationships. These questions allowed the participants an open opportunity to not only share their understanding of forgiveness, empathy, and reconciliation (community) but also showed how each participant was willing to learn more about the process.

Table 2: Class Schedule

Class Schedule
Week 1
• 10- minutes to take Pre-surveys
• 15- minutes to create a journal entry on how you view forgiveness and the effects of unforgiveness in your life.
• 45 minutes for participants to voluntarily share entries and for the researcher to provide feedback.
Week 2
• 40-minute lesson on the sermon on Genesis 50-15-21- “You Meant it for My Bad, But God Meant It for My Good”
• 10-minute break
• 45-minute group discussion with life application and summary.
• 15-minute journaling and collection of journals.
Week 3
• 40-minute lesson on the sermon from Colossians 3:12-15 – “Bear With Me Please.”
• 10-minute break
• 45-minute group discussion with life application and summary.
• 15-minute journaling and collection of journals.
Week 4
• 40 minutes -minute lesson on the sermon from Matthew 18:21-34 – “What Goes Around Comes Around.”
• 10-minute break
• 45-minute group discussion with life application and summary.
• 15-minute journaling and collection of journals.

Week 5
• 40-minute lesson on the sermon from Matthew 6:14-15 – "Forgiving and Forgiven."
• 10-minute break
• 45-minute group discussion with life application and summary.
• 15-minute journaling and collection of journals.
Week 6
• Centering moment and lesson on the sermon from 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 – "Given to Reconciliation." (40 minutes)
• Break (10 minutes)
• Group discussion with life application and summary. (45 minutes)
• Journaling and collection of journals. (15 minutes)
Week 7
• 40-minute lesson on the sermon from Matthew 5:23-24 – "The Ministry of Reconciliation"
• 10-minute break
• 45-minute group discussion with life application and summary.
• 15-minute journaling and collection of journals.
Week 8
• 10 minutes to collect journals
• 10 minutes to take post-survey
• 60 minutes post Interviews

Implementation

The implementation of this project was based on the approved project proposal, with an increased willingness to forgive as the goal. This project design consisted of a study of eight participants. All eight participants were members of New Home AME Zion Church. The project consisted of six sessions, which were each two hours in length.

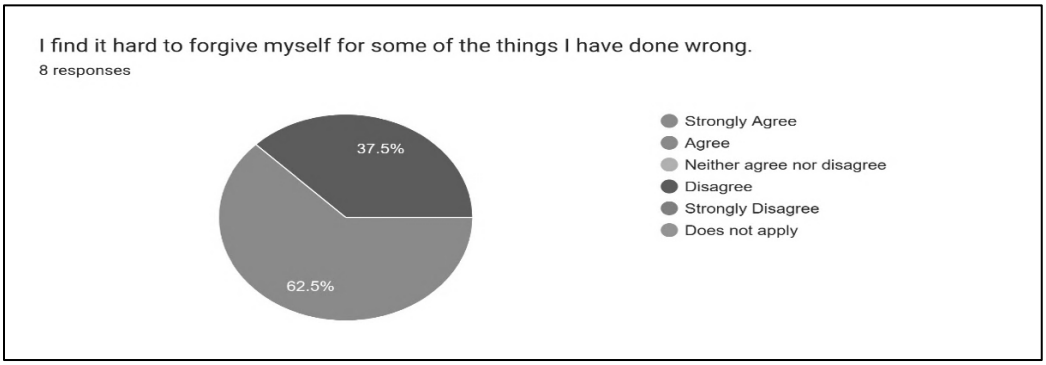
Table 3: Pre-Survey

Pre-Survey
1. What is "unforgiveness"?

2. How do you define forgiveness?
3. I find it hard to forgive myself for some of the things I have done wrong
a. Strongly agree
b. Agree
c. Neither agree nor disagree
a) Disagree
b) Strongly agree
c) Does not apply
4. I find it hard to forgive others for past mistakes.
a) Strongly Agree
b) Agree
c) Neither agree nor disagree
d) Disagree
e) Strongly disagree
f) Does not apply
3. How often do you hold resentment or keep it inside when someone has hurt you?
a) Never
b) Hardly ever
c) Not too often
d) Fairly often
e) Very often
f) Does not apply
4. When someone has hurt you, how often do you try to get even somehow?
a) Never
b) Hardly ever
c) Not too often
d) Fairly often
e) Very often
f) Does not apply
5. When you are hurt by someone, how often do you try to forgive the other person?
a) Never
b) Hardly ever
c) Not too often
d) Fairly often
e) Very often
f) Does not apply
6. I have grudges that I have held on to for months or more.
a) Strongly agree
b) Agree
c) Neither agree nor disagree
d) Disagree
e) Strongly disagree
f) Does not apply

7. I forgive those who have hurt me.
a) Strongly agree
b) Agree
c) Neither agree nor disagree
d) Disagree
e) Strongly disagree
f) Does not apply
8. I feel better knowing about myself, knowing that God has forgiven me for my sins.
a) Strongly agree
b) Agree
c) Neither agree nor disagree
d) Disagree
e) Strongly disagree
f) Does not apply
9. If God forgives me, I should forgive others.
a) Strongly agree
b) Agree
c) Neither agree nor disagree
d) Disagree
e) Strongly disagree
f) Does not apply
10. I usually am empathetic when someone hurts me and am willing to forgive and reconcile.
a) Strongly agree
b) Agree
c) Neither agree nor disagree

Pre-Survey Question 1



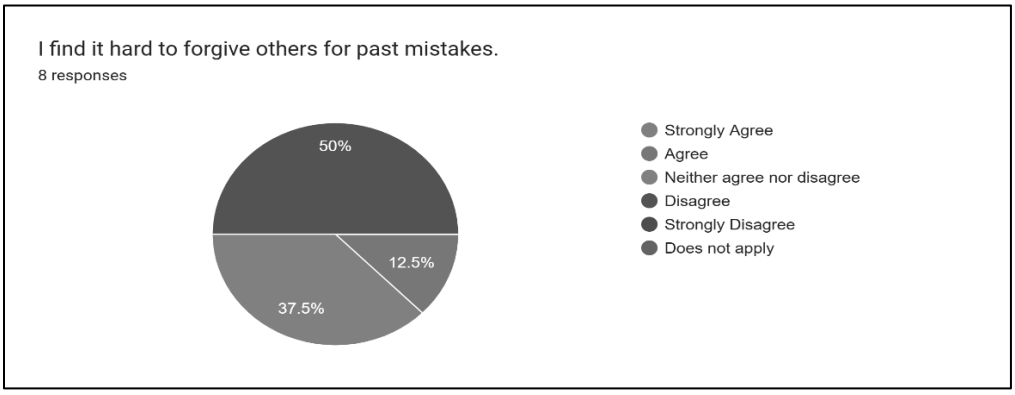
Question one aimed to assess the participants' awareness of unforgiveness and how it has affected their lives. The participants were expected to have a minimal

understanding of how to define unforgiveness and its effects. As indicated in the chart below, 62% of the participants found it hard to forgive themselves when they had done wrong, while 37.5% did not.

Table 4: Pre-Survey Question 1 – How do you define Unforgiveness?

Unforgiveness is when your hurt emotionally or physically, beyond “I’m sorry”
Unforgiveness is when an individual is unable to release resentment towards another for a wrong.
To not forgive despite the opportunity to do so
The inability or unwillingness to forgive someone for breaking your trust or upsetting you.
when someone is unable to reconcile with a person due to an act that is hurtful, mean natured, betrayal, vindictive act the offender has performed
Unable to forgive someone for breaking or trust or betraying you
When you are unwilling to Really that's what just seen at a funeral forgive someone that upsets you breaking all the trust you have in that person
The inability to forgive or let go of something or someone

Pre-Survey – Question 2



Question two aimed to assess the participants’ awareness of forgiveness and how it has affected their lives. Participants were expected to have a minimal understanding of how forgiveness is defined and how it affects their lives. This chart shows that 50% of

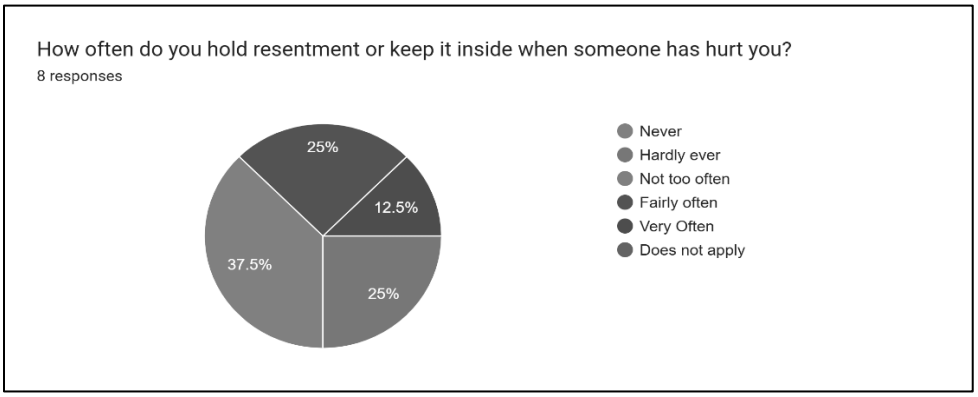
the participants did not find it hard to forgive other people, while 12% did. Some of the various participant responses are listed in Table 3.

Table 5: Pre-Survey Question. How do you define Forgiveness?

Forgiveness is doing what is required of us by God. Letting go of something that hurt you.
To let go of the pain inflicted by another.
To forgive and forget
Inability to let go of past hurts
when you can acknowledged you've been wrong but you can let go of the feelings of being wronged to show grace despite the offense
Willing to put aside your feelings of resentment towards someone who has hurt you
Willfully putting aside feelings towards someone who was unfair to you
Being able to break free from; let go of someone or something that has cause hurt, harm or danger to you

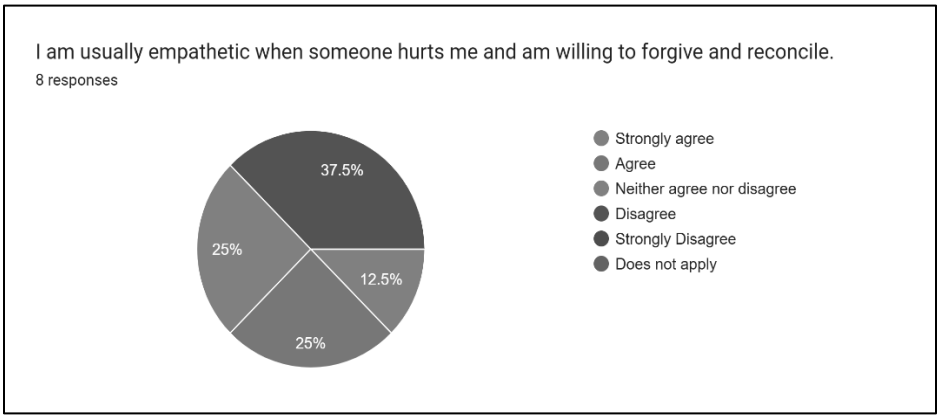
The third question was designed to measure the participant's willingness to forgive themselves. As the participants mature through the process, they learn to forgive themselves and others who have hurt them. Sixty-two-point five percent of participants found it hard to forgive themselves, while 37.5% of participants disagreed or did not find it hard to forgive themselves. Question four was designed to measure the participant's need to avenge themselves when feeling offended and their willingness to trust the process of God's role in forgiveness. Fifty percent of the participants disagreed with finding it hard to forgive others, while 12.5% did find it hard to forgive others. The fifth question measured the participant's willingness to forgive first and how committed they may be to the forgiveness process. Thirty-seven-point-five percent of participants answered not too often, while 25% answered very often. No one answered the question about holding resentment, which indicated that all the participants had resentment issues of some type.

Pre-Survey Question 5



Question six measured the participant's willingness to surrender their feelings about the offense and the offender. In question seven, my intent was to measure the participant's openness to get past the offense and closer to the possibility of reconciliation. In questions eight through ten, my intent was to measure how the participant feels after receiving forgiveness from God, which may enhance their willingness to forgive others and move to reconciliation, to measure the participant's embodiment of God's reciprocation of forgiveness and their willingness to allow God to complete the process through them and not attempt to do it themselves and to practice empathy, which may make the participant more open to reconciliation. Another interesting statistic was that only 37% of participants disagreed with holding grudges, which indicated that the balance of the group dealt with grudge holds in some way. When responding to the pre-survey question about empathy and willingness to reconcile when hurt by someone, 37.5% of participants disagreed, which indicates that more than half of the participants were non-empathetic and unwilling to reconcile when hurt by someone.

Pre-Survey Question 10



Sessions

Session one was an hour long and consisted of the program overview, signing of consent to participate forms, pre-survey, and interviews. Each of the eight adult participants voluntarily consented to participate in the sessions, understanding that they could discontinue participation at any time without repercussions. In sessions two-seven, each participant was expressive of what they received from the weekly sermon. After participating in the centering moment, the group discussed the particular topic of the centering moment, and the group exchanged views on how the particular subject of discussion has affected them during the group. Below is the project calendar with dates and times, as well as the weekly topic of discussion for each group. After each group, the participants participated in a guided journaling activity addressing whether the session impacted their willingness to forgive. Journal entries were completed after each session. In session eight, the participants received a summary of learning a post-survey and a program survey.

Project Calendar

Table 6: Project Calendar

Date	Task	Scriptural Focus
Saturday, June 22	Pre-project Survey and Interviews	
Wednesday, June 26	Sermon One/Bible Discussion	Genesis 50-15-21
Wednesday, July 3	Sermon Two/ Bible Discussion	Colossians 3:12-15
Wednesday, July 10	Sermon Three/ Bible Discussion	Matthew 18: 21-34
Wednesday, July 17	Sermon Four/ Bible Discussion	Mattthew 6: 14-15
Wednesday, July 31	Sermon Five/Bible Discussion	2 Corinthians 5:18-19
Wednesday, August 7	Sermon Six/ Bible Discussion	Matthew 5:23-24
Saturday, August 17	Post-Project Survey and Interviews	

Session Two

The centering moment in session two was based on the foundational

the scripture found in Genesis 50:15-21 which reads:

> Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?" So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, 'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves." But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them" (Gen 50:15-21, NRSV).
>
> Genesis 50-15-21- "You Meant it for My Bad, But God Meant It for My Good.

The sermon was designed to create thought around the circumstances that led to Jospeh's dialogue with his brothers. The sermon had three main points of discussion: 1. Forgiveness is God's plan for righteousness (v. 17), 2. Forgiveness is God's plan for Reverence (vv. 19-20), and 3. Forgiveness is God's plan for Reconciliation (v. 21). The

sermonic objective in this session was to get the participants thinking and talking about the need for the type of spiritual maturity Joseph possessed. Joesph forgave his brothers not because of the process they put him through but for the place that the process landed him in God's plan.

The group discussion seemed to focus on the brother's description of their "crime" against their brother Joseph. The group's view of this statement was two-fold. Firstly, the group felt like the brothers were really seeking their own healing by categorizing their own behavior as a crime. Secondly, Joseph's level of maturity towards God's plan for his life. Three of the participants questioned whether they could ever make it to a place in their life's journey where the sight of the person(s) that hurt them would be overtaken by the joy of the plan of God for their lives.

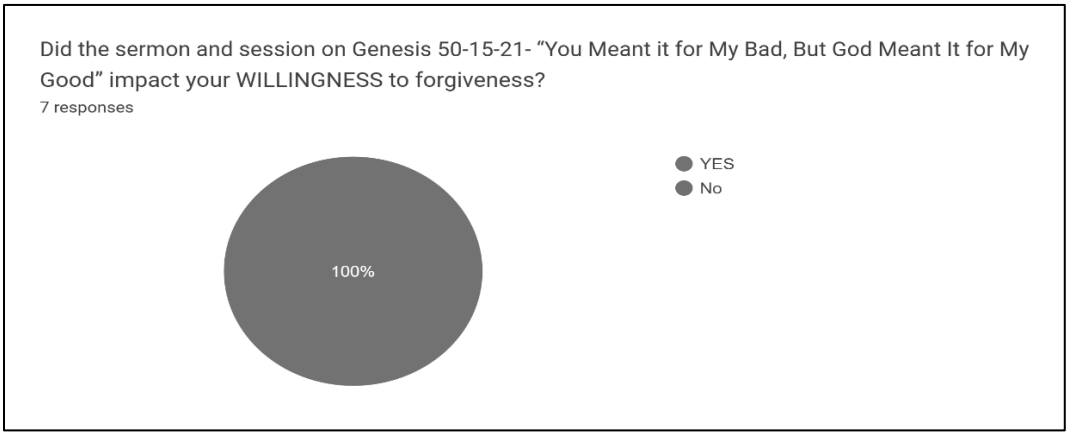
After the group discussion, the group watched a video of Dr. Everett L. Worthington speaking about forgiveness and his personal testimony of his mother's murder. As noted in the interdisciplinary chapter, Worthington is a well-known psychologist who specializes in forgiveness theory. Dr. Worthington expounded on how he came to understand forgiveness theory and developed a five-step process of forgiveness called R.E.A.C.H.

1. Recall the hurt that was done to you
2. Empathize with the person who hurt you
3. Altruistic gift of forgiveness and not a self-interested one

4. Commit to the forgiveness
5. Hold on to that forgiveness[2]

In the session, Worthington spoke about the darkness of his own heart by wanting to do to the murderer what he did to his mother. The participants seemed to be overwhelmed by the revelation. Two of the participants were brought to tears as they listened to the story of how his mother was murdered. The entire group reflected on the strength it took for Worthington to reach the kind of maturity that he could be that empathetic towards the murderer.

Session Two – Guided Journal Question


Did the sermon and session on Genesis 50-15-21- "You Meant it for My Bad, But God Meant It for My Good" impact your WILLINGNESS to forgiveness?
7 responses
YES
No
100%

The session ended with guided journal reflections, from which I will share a few responses below. Seven of the eight participants responded to the following journal question: Did the sermon and session on Genesis 50-15-21- "You Meant it for My Bad, But God Meant It for My Good" impact your willingness to forgive? The chart above

[2] Paraclete Press, "The Power of Forgiveness with Dr. Everett L. Worthington," May 10, 2012, YouTube, 4:35, https://youtu.be/UF-HrXu6kvc?si=DoaB6vM5V3ImZZy_.

shows that 100% of the responding participants answered yes to the question. Below is a table of the individual participant responses to the guided journal question.

Table 7: Session Two – Guided Journal Question Responses

Participant #	Response
008	I have to check reexamine myself and no matter what someone has done to me in order for me to heal, I have to forgive. Forgiveness is not for the person; it is for me. So even though, someone means harm, God will turn it around for my good. He will make you enemies your footstool.
001	I think the processes that I have been through have only made me better. In hindsight, I thank God for what He allows because what He allows does work for my good.
002	What do you do after the hurt? Just as Joseph I want to come out of the pit with a purpose. I have come to realize that it is hard to forgive what I cannot forget. I must stop allowing things to linger in my mind. I must forget what happened yesterday and not allow this to control my life.
006	Its impact was getting me to consider empathy. To empathize with the person who caused the hurt. It raised a challenging question of can I do it every time someone has done harm to me and understanding its can part of our process to forgiveness on some level.
004	Yes, there was an impact in my thoughts on willingness to forgiveness from Genesis 50:15-21, God cannot use you if you live in unforgiveness. Forgiveness is not a choice it is a responsibility. Forgiveness is for yourself, let it go and give it to God.
005	Somethings that happen to you are to strengthen you and place you in the place God wants you in. Even though people have wronged you it is to fill God's plan. So, holding on to your grudge against them is fruitless.
003	After attending the first session on Forgiveness and Reconciliation I can honestly say that it was very much helpful. Hearing about the story of Joseph and his brothers (in Genesis 50) and their process towards reconciliation.

Session Three

Session three began with a centering moment based on the week's focus text found in Colossians 3:12-15. The sermon title was "Bear With Me Please." The main objective of the sermon was to move the participants from a more self-seeking interpretation of the process of forgiveness to a more empathetic consideration of the things others go through as well. The sermon had three main points of emphasis that all believers should have in mind when approaching forgiveness as a process in their lives: a changed life, mind, and heart.

The Apostle Paul continues the theme of forgiveness among believers in the New Testament.

> As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another, and if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, you must also forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful (Col. 3:12-15, NRSV).

The apostle encourages believers in the church at Colossae to be a community through forgiveness and reconciliation. This text gives way to God's desire for humankind to live together in a community by bearing with one another and forgiving one another when a complaint arises. The lack of harmony among people goes against what God desires for God's followers. Past grievances and the inability to forgive have hindered the purpose on earth. Looking at Joseph's story gives us hope that healing relationships in times of conflict is possible. Both Joseph and his brothers played a role in restoring peace within their family after a past. Repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation were steps they had to take. It was important for Joseph's brothers to

understand the permanent harm their animosity towards him could have caused. On the other hand, Joseph needed to trust in God's plan and process throughout the journey. This narrative emphasizes that forgiveness is essential not for individuals but for communities. Believers are urged to reflect on God's nature and extend forgiveness to others just as they have received from Him. Forgiveness is a gift from God meant to be shared among His children as an act of love and unity following God's example of forgiving one another.[3]

The Apostle Paul discusses the transformation of humanity into beings through the grace of Jesus Christ. He teaches that in Christ, distinctions like Greek or Jew circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free no longer hold significance. Instead, he highlights that Christ is present in everyone and everything (3:11). Even those who are marginalized and oppressed within the Colossians community as those who exert control over them are valued participants in the narrative of Jesus. Those often deemed unworthy by others, he is also experiencing a renewal in his likeness.[4]

The foundation of God's community is built upon reconciliation through love. Osborne highlights how the original Greek text includes "participles," translated here as "bearing with and forgiving one another." According to Osborne, Paul suggests that by

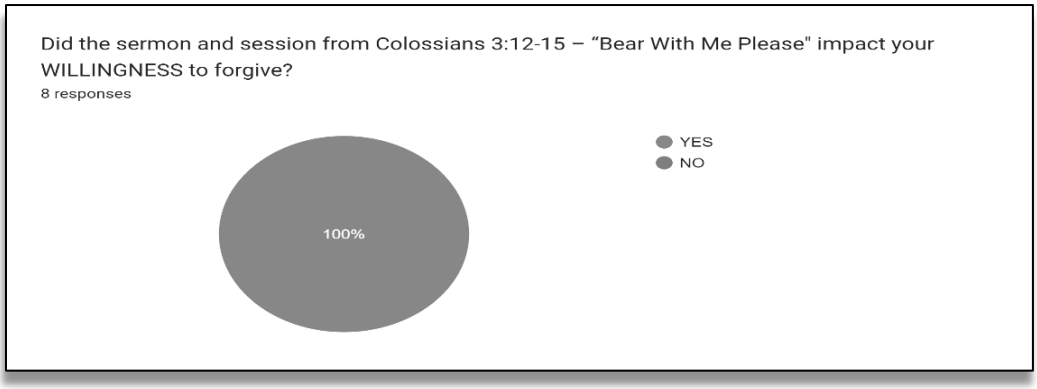
---

[3] Barth Markus, Helmut Blanke, and Astrid B. Beck "Exhortations (3:1–4:6)," in *Colossians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 422, http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9780300261714.0008.CH005.

[4] Sylvia C. Keesmaat and Neil Elliott, "Colossians," in *The Letters and Legacy of Paul: Fortress Commentary on the Bible Study Edition*, eds. Margaret Aymer, Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, and David A. Sánchez (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2016), 566, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1b3t6ns.17.

practicing tolerance and forgiveness, we can embody the virtues outlined in this verse and come together as God's new community.[5]

Session Three – Guided Journal Question


Did the sermon and session from Colossians 3:12-15 – "Bear With Me Please" impact your WILLINGNESS to forgive?
8 responses
YES
NO
100%

The session ended with guided journal reflections, from which I will share a few responses below. Seven of the eight participants responded to the following journal question: Did the sermon and session on Colossians 3:12-15 - "Bear With Me" impact your willingness to forgive? The chart above shows that 100% of the responding participants answered yes to the question. Below is a table of the individual participant responses to the guided journal question.

Table 8: Session Three - Guided Journal Question Responses

Participant #	Response
002	The sermon helped me to understand that forgiveness is a journey that starts with me. We never think about the things we need forgiveness for or the people we have hurt. As I look over my life, I know I have also done wrong. When I was young, I made bad decisions in my life. During that time, I left a train wreck behind me, but I prayed to God to rebuild and restore my life.

[5] Grant R. Osborne, *Colossians and Philemon Verse by Verse* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 75.

008	I have to forgive with deep love and compassion. I have to let God into my heart in order to forgive them.
004	Yes, the sermon and session from this week has impacted my willingness to forgive. I have learned that I have to remove my guilt, anger, disappointment, and frustration in order to allow myself to heal. As I am healing, it has opened up my willingness to forgive so that I can continue to build my relationship with God, my church, and community.
003	The first notion that I was reminded of was the devil operates in division. His main goal is to divide people. If people are divided then they cannot walk in unity. If they do not walk in unity with one another then they are not walking in unity with God. The second notion that I learned in Colossians 3:12-15 is it spoke of what we are to put on as a result of being God's chosen ones. It spoke of putting on several things such as compassion, kindness, gentleness and patience. The last thing we are told to put on is love. What I found interesting is love is like an outer layer. I imagined putting on the other things spoke of but since love was last it was like a coat that protects the other things.
006	It puts the responsibility back on us as individuals to self-evaluate because we are no better than the one who have hurt us. We all sin and are living by grace. Who am I or what gives me the right to not forgive or ask for forgiveness from others. It makes you look at you.
007	God made us with feelings but if you are going to see God pay you back for the wrongs. You have to rule over those feelings. You have to get passion back and start moving forward. If you use it as an excuse to stay hurt, it will keep you from your purpose.
001	I am more willing to bear with the people in my life who are struggling with forgiving or bearing with a person because I want God to bear with me cause I need Him daily to give me mercy and grace.
005	This session had a profound effect on how I view forgiveness in two ways. First the thought that we view others from the way we view ourselves rather than where we are presently. We put more emphasis on the person's current state not the progress they are making or the direction they are heading. Secondly, the thought that if God muted my words would my actions still reflect Christ has caused me to rethink how I treat people. My actions have to reflect the words I am speaking.

Session Four

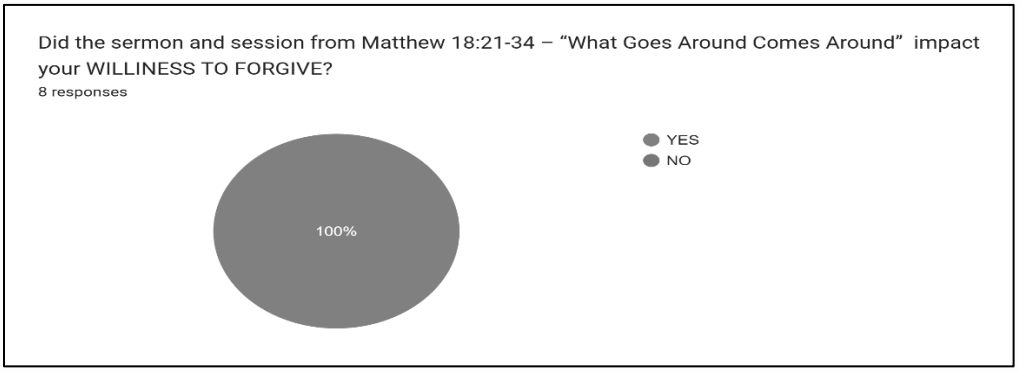
The centering moment in session four began with a scriptural focus found in Matthew 18:21-34. The participants read and openly reflected on the sermon "What Goes Around Comes Around." The session objective was to address the altruistic gift of forgiveness. The sermon and discussion emphasized three main points: growing forgiveness, gaining forgiveness, and gifting forgiveness. Each of these points of discussion causes the participant to consider that sowing seeds of forgiveness is linked to their gathering or gaining forgiveness, and once gained, forgiveness should be given. In his forgiveness model R.E.A.C.H., Dr. Everett Worthington teaches that forgiveness should be given as a gift without the intent of personal gain. The "A" in R.E.A.C.H. stands for Altruistic Gift. As stated in this chapter's interdisciplinary chapter, Worthington teaches that altruism in forgiveness is offering forgiveness as an act of generosity. We all experience moments when we have hurt someone, be it a parent, teacher, or friend, and they choose to forgive us. In those instances, a burden was lifted off our shoulders. We felt motivated not to let down that forgiving individual by repeating our mistakes. By extending forgiveness without motives, you are bestowing upon others the compassionate gift that you received when forgiven for your wrongdoings.

In the parable, the servant's need became a selfish motivation, as he never considered that his freedom from the penalty of his debt greatly hinged on his gift of forgiveness to the servant who was indebted to him. The servant's lack of empathy and unwillingness to gift forgiveness to the one indebted to him warranted him to reap a harvest of unforgiveness. When discussing this part of the project, many participants had

trouble seeing themselves first while going through the forgiveness process. Participant 007 seemed passionate about being hurt in the past and not being able to see her offender as deserving of grace. Other participants agreed in further discussion. Participant 004 mentioned how unnerving apologizing can be when someone is offensive. Other participants talked about the love of God for both the offended and the offender. God's love is closely associated with altruism. Empathetic relations between believers will produce an altruistic approach to God's love, even when offended. The participant found it interesting that altruism is directly related to religion and scientific study. Altruism is used in many secular circles as a type of replacement for the agape love of God.[6]

In Enright's six stages of forgiveness, forgiving someone is a way to show love. Hurtful actions do not change the commitment to love. Forgiveness keeps the door open for reconciliation.[7] Further discussion comparing love and altruism revealed that Participant 003 was happy with the correlation and vowed to implement this concept.

Session Four Guided Journal Question


Did the sermon and session from Matthew 18:21-34 – "What Goes Around Comes Around" impact your WILLINESS TO FORGIVE?
8 responses
YES
NO
100%

[6] Stephen G. Post, "Unlimited Love: Altruism, Compassion, and Service," My I Library, http://www.myilibrary.com?id=326082.

[7] Sells, and Hargrave, *Forgiveness: A Review of the Theoretical and Empirical Literature*, 27-28.

The session ended with guided journal reflections where the participants answered, Did the sermon and session from Matthew 18:21-34 – “What Goes Around Comes Around” impact your willingness to forgive? Each participant indicated that session four's content impacted their willingness to forgive. The chart above shows that 100% of the responding participants answered yes to the question. Below is a table of the individual participant responses to the guided journal question.

Table 9: Session Four -Guided Journal Question Responses

Participant #	Response
004	Yes, very much so. It made me realize how much mercy God has shown me. I thank God that He does not treat me like I treat other people who have wronged me. This scripture, sermon, and session have been an eye-opener. It has shown me to forgive quicker and show the mercy that God has shown me
008	God forgives us, so we have to forgive
003	This sermon, "What goes around comes around," was eye-opening. In verse twenty-two, Jesus says to forgive up to seventy by seven. While I am pretty sure Jesus was not trying to be specific about the number of times you need to forgive someone, He was reminding us always to forgive. As we seek forgiveness from God, we should extend forgiveness to others. The reward for not doing so is not to receive forgiveness from God. As I reflect on this, I realize that I need God daily to forgive me for the things He knows I have committed. Since this is true, I have learned to give forgiveness to others. Now I will say that there are times where it takes me months to forgive but as I now reflect on this session I am left with the question "What if it takes months for God to forgive me." I am working on letting go of offenses and its residue. At the end of day forgiveness frees me and gives me liberty that Christ has given me.
007	Jesus was saying Forgiveness should be a constant part of your life. Jesus set a system in place That every day we should be ready to forgive, and we would not be holding on to hurts, offenses, and disappointments; the quicker you let things go, the easier it is.
001	I think that this series continually impacts my willingness to forgive. The boomerang effect was an eye-opening scenario. I do feel like I do unto others liken unto myself or try to treat people as I want to be treated.

006	There was a lot, but when I look at it from God's dealings with me are based on or predicated upon how I am with others or how I treat others, it makes me want to stop and take inventory spiritually and physically. God operates base on his second commandment to love your neighbor as Christ loves you. There is weight to this comment because God is saying how to treat or deal with others will be the measuring tool for how he will deal with me. God is relational, and we are all connected, and for the connection to work at its optimum level. There should not be anything hindering the connection, which is unforgiveness. The illustration of the boomerang of what you throw out to others will come back to you was also good and added to my understanding.
002	The sermon and the session helped me understand the road to forgiveness. Peter thought seven times was enough to forgive, but Jesus came back and classified the answer for Peter. Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” So, forgiveness is a straight line that will never end because as long as we live, we are guaranteed to be hurt by someone. Forgiveness is like a never-ending loop, always hitting the replay button because we will eventually need forgiveness from someone. The sermon helped me understand that I am the one who may need forgiveness for the things that I have done against someone. We often forget that we have made mistakes against others. As I look back on my life, I have offended some people, and I have asked for their forgiveness.
005	The first lesson learned from this session is that forgiveness should be a lifestyle, not just an event. Secondly, how can we even entertain not forgiving when the Lord has forgiven us of so much? The most profound lesson learned is "Is unforgiveness worth your own torment?

Session Five

Session five began with a centering moment based on the scriptural focus found in Matthew 6:14-15. The sermonic reflection and group discussion centered on the sermon “Forgiving and Forgiven.” The sermonic objective was to continue the thought of an intrapersonal approach to forgiveness through empathetic application. In this text, Jesus is teaching his disciples one of the most essential concepts of forgiveness. He teaches them the importance of a more relational approach to forgiveness. The

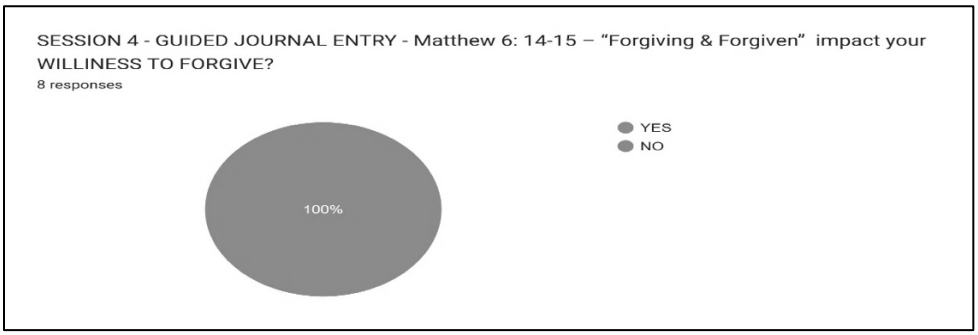
participants learned more about intrapersonal forgiveness from a video presentation of Dr. Worthington defining forgiveness. He defines forgiveness in two ways: forgiveness is a decision, not a behavior, and forgiveness is emotional or intrapersonal, which includes empathy and altruism.[8]

Participant Three raised a question about the difference between a behavior and a decision: decisions affect behavior. Several participants, including Participant Four, attempted to clarify how deciding not to get revenge is not an actual behavior. Revenge would be the behavior. Participant Two wanted to learn more about the concept because dealing with certain aspects of forgiveness has been a "true struggle." Participant Six shared how difficult it is for some people to overcome emotional pain and consider the possibility of empathetic or altruistic forgiveness.

The Worthington definition of forgiveness stimulated an intrinsic thought that many of the participants should be interested in knowing more about. The foundational text for this session seemed to coincide with Worthington's two-part definition, which challenged the participants to consider forgiveness as an intrinsic decision not to act in response to offense. Participant Two seemed to get emotional about an issue that could not be shared openly. This session felt to that participant like "a weight had been lifted."

[8] New Church Story, "What is Forgiveness? Dr. Worthington," June 16, 2021, YouTube, 1:42, https://youtu.be/bJ1lOygJwpA?si=tx6fIu9YeTn2Nb_R.

Session Five - Guided Journal Question


SESSION 4 - GUIDED JOURNAL ENTRY - Matthew 6: 14-15 – "Forgiving & Forgiven" impact your WILLINESS TO FORGIVE?
8 responses
YES
NO
100%

The session ended with guided journal reflections where the participants answered, Did the sermon and session from Matthew 6:14-15 – "Forgiving and Forgiven" impact your willingness to forgive? Each participant indicated that session four's content impacted their willingness to forgive. The chart above shows that 100% of the responding participants answered yes. Below is a table of the individual participant responses to the guided journal question.

Table 10: Session Five -Guided Journal Question Responses

Participant #	Response
004	Yes, the sermon from Matthew 6:14-15 and the session on forgiving and forgiving impacted my willingness to forgive. I understood the statement that God is a relational God; it is not about how you feel. It is about how you make others feel and that forgiveness is for you and not the other person. Also, God revealed to me that I could trust him with everything, and I think I needed to know that; which allowed me to let go and truly hear from God.
008	You have to put your trust in God and let him work out the situation.

003	The session on "Forgiving and Forgiven" continues to reinforce the notion that my ability to receive forgiveness is based on my ability to give forgiveness to others. As I reflect on this session, I think about all the unnecessary frustration and anger I held on to and how it stopped me from healing. When I am reminded that God has forgiven me, I should move fast to work to forgive others. One of the statements during the session is the thought that our ability to forgive is connected to our trust in God to handle the offender. I believe I can become so consumed with other people that I neglect to focus on what the process is teaching me. In the session, I stated that I do not consume myself with the offender but understand that God is using that situation to take me to a place. Pastor Gregory highlighted the importance of not focusing so much on the destination but on being sure that I am present in my situation. I am going to have to work on slowing down.
006	For example, processing the relationship between us and others and between us and God. Those relationships are tied to God's forgiveness or non-forgiveness of my trespasses. My blessings and doors of opportunity truly rest on my forgiveness of others who have done wrong to me. It was insightful to hear I need to take my trust out of the hands of man and put it in God's hand because he (God) can do all things for me and not fail.
002	The sermon about forgiveness made me recognize that there are things I need to be forgiven for. I have made mistakes in my life for which I sincerely seek forgiveness, and I desire God's forgiveness for my sins. Pastor Gregory's sermon helped me to understand that forgiveness plays in our relationship with God and one another. In Matthew 6:14-15, Jesus presents forgiveness as a returning act, highlighting that the forgiveness we extend to others directly impacts the forgiveness we receive from our Heavenly Father. I am learning through these sermons that forgiveness is solely for me and not for anyone else. I value my relationship with my Heavenly Father, and I want his forgiveness; therefore, I must learn to forgive others who have offended me.
005	In this session it was emphasized that forgiveness is not about you and your offender, rather it is all about your place in God. Therefore, it encumbered upon to forgive to maintain my relationship with God.
007	In Matthew 6:14-15, Jesus emphasizes the importance of forgiveness. He states that if we forgive others for their sins, then God will also forgive us for our sins. However, if we do not forgive others, then God will not forgive us. Jesus teaches that forgiveness is essential for receiving and experiencing God's forgiveness in our own lives. By practicing forgiveness, we can experience the freedom and peace that comes from being in right relationship with both God and our fellow human beings.

001	I will forgive because I have been forgiven.

Session Six

The centering moment in session six was based on the scriptural focus in 2 Corinthian 5:18-19. The sermonic reflection and group discussion centered on the sermon "Given to Reconciliation." In this session, the foundational thought was to introduce the group to the relational character of God. As the theological chapter discusses, God desires to be with his creation. This bond that God has with his creation was indeed broken when sin was introduced into the world God had created. The main emphasis of this text is the reconciliation God received with his creation through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is because of the reconciliation that God gave us, his people, the ministry of reconciliation. Reconciliation is key in the relationship God has with his people, as well as his people with each other.

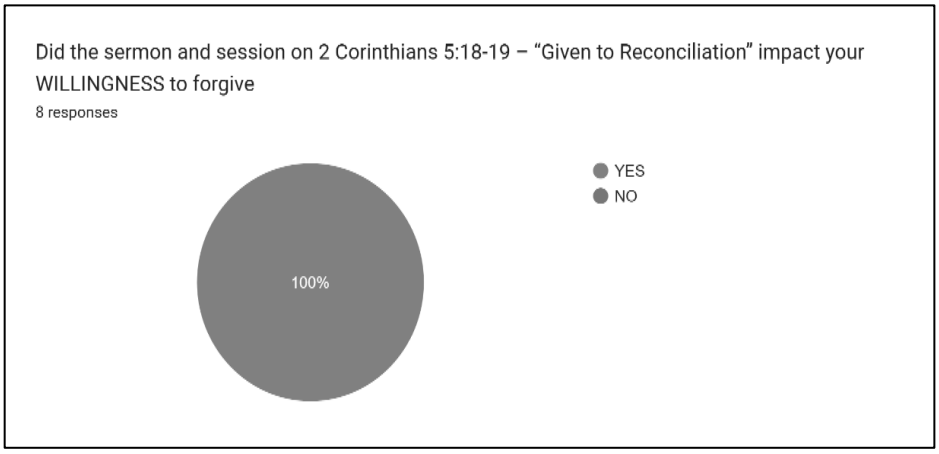
Cees Van der Kooi states, "God's intention is for human beings and their world to live and exist under the beneficial sovereignty of God."[9] He also suggests in his teaching that God's desire to be with his people falls under the concept of covenant. God sent his son so that he could be our God and his creation could be his people. So, Jesus' ministry of reconciliation includes both covenant and kingdom. The participants learned a view of reconciliation as the work of God through salvation. God's saving grace through Christ Jesus has empowered his people to go into the world and reconcile God's creation to God.

[9] Cees Van der Kooi, "Three Models of Reconciliation: A Christian Approach," In *Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation* (Leiden, NE: Brill, 2002), https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004494671_012.

Participant Seven was a bit confused during the discussion. The participant wanted to know more about the ministry of reconciliation concerning mankind. After listening to further dialogue, Participant Seven understood how the ministry of reconciliation came to Jesus Christ first and is associated with mankind through soteriology or the doctrine of salvation. In the ministry of reconciliation, Jesus leads people back to a life in God. God desires his people to live in a reconciled harmony based on their relationship with Christ.

The group discussion shifted to the fact that God's relationship with his people is to be duplicated among them. Participant Three confessed how difficult reconciliation is after certain offenses. The group agreed that forgiveness and reconciliation can be complicated but are entirely possible.

Session Six - Guided Journal Question


Did the sermon and session on 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 – "Given to Reconciliation" impact your WILLINGNESS to forgive
8 responses
YES
NO
100%

The session ended with guided journal reflections where the participants answered, "Did the sermon and session from 2 Corinthians 5:18-19" impact your willingness to forgive? Each participant indicated that session four's content impacted their willingness to forgive. The chart above shows that 100% of the responding

participants answered yes. Below is a table of the individual participant responses to the guided journal question.

Table 11: Session Six - Guided Journal Question Responses

Participant #	Response
002	This sermon touched me because we are supposed to forgive people and bring them back together after their mistakes. I love seeing the best in people and this often backfires on me. When I was in my thirties, I had this guy friend, and he was more like a brother. I mean we made money together, we went to college together, and we shared our dreams. I knew his family and his girlfriend. One day I noticed that his girlfriend started acting strange and I did not know why. One day I asked her in front of him. She said: "TK told me that you have been trying to holler at him and that you and he had a relationship.
=001	I believe in the ministry of reconciliation. I feel like everyone has that ministry as well. The process of reconciliation affords us the privilege of true brotherhood.
007	Praying for forgiveness: Church members should pray for the grace and strength to forgive others as they have been forgiven by God. Prayer can help individuals release feelings of anger and resentment, soften their hearts towards those who have wronged them, and create an attitude of forgiveness and reconciliation.
006	I am accepting that reconciliation is of God through Christ Jesus to bring us closer to Him. It is God's desire to come back to him and the only way back is through Jesus Christ because God is a relational God which is why the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. In order to be obedient to the first commandment we must first be reconciled with each other because it can hinder receiving the fullness of God. I do want anything to stop God from flowing freely in my life. Reconciliation leads to the ministry of restoration; being restored back to God after interruption of unforgiveness.
003	As I reflect on this session what stood out the most to me is that reconciliation is a ministry. A lot of times we focus on the outward ministry that people can see such as preaching, singing, worshipping, etc., but one of the things that really make us follower of Jesus Christ is that we are able to reconcile to those that have offended us. This quest to reconciliation should be done because Christ reconciled us to Him.

008	In order to reconcile you have to have Jesus in your heart. Give the problem to God and he will help with the reconciliation.
005	In the same way, God has reconciled himself through Jesus we have to reconcile ourselves to each other. In the same way, we have been forgiven we must grace other in the same way.
004	In 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, Paul explains the concept of reconciliation. He emphasizes that God has reconciled us to Himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. This means that through Christ, God has restored the broken relationship between Himself and humanity. As believers, we are called to share this message of reconciliation with others.

Session Seven and Eight

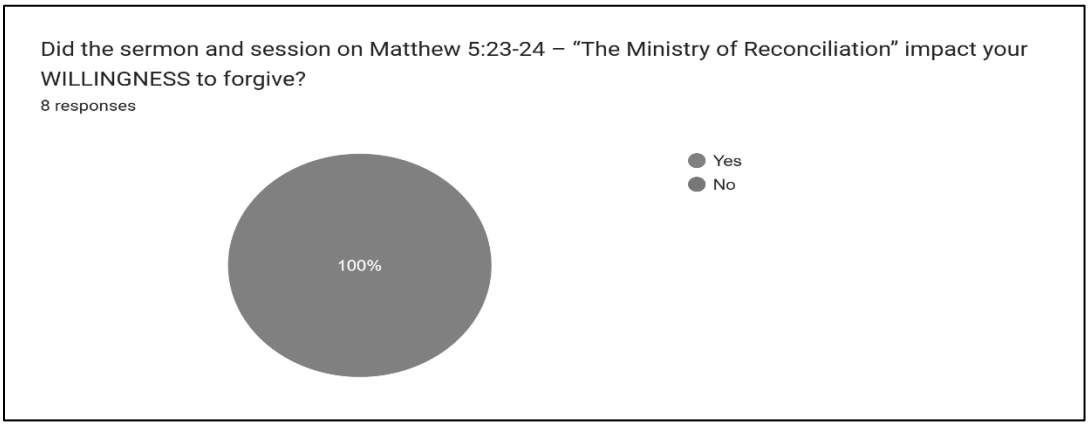
The centering moment in session seven was based on the scriptural focus in Matthew 5:23-24 – "The Ministry of Reconciliation." The sermonic reflection and group discussion centered on the sermon "The Ministry of Reconciliation." The foundational thought in this session was to introduce the group to God's desire for community. Reconciliation builds community. The chosen text finds the servant who had discovered an ought with his brother while praying. The instructions were to leave the gifts and reconcile with your brother first.

The participants were shown a video of Dr. Worthington discussing the F.R.E.E. model as a path to reconciliation.[10] According to Worthington, reconciliation is based on trust. People can forgive and not reconcile, and they can reconcile and not forgive. The acronym F.R.E.E. stands for Facing Reconciliation through Experiencing Empathy. According to Worthington, one must decide what type of reconciliation will happen to set specifics about when the work will occur. Talk about their transgressions through

[10] Jennifer Ripley, "Worthington on Forgiveness Session Five - Reconciliation," August 6, 2018, YouTube, 12:48, https://youtu.be/rLlDCvrC4h0?si=taEM5YFZWW6iStny.

reproach. Reproach occurs when a request is made to explain why the transgression happened. The offender gives an account of the transgressions. Worthington teaches what poor accountability looks like. Poor accountability includes denial, blaming others or justification of the wrong, making excuses, CONFESS: Confess the wrongdoing; Offer an apology without excuse; Note the others' pain; Forever value the person; Equalize or exchange a good deed for a bad deed; Say "never again;" and Seek forgiveness.

Session Seven Guided Journal Question


Did the sermon and session on Matthew 5:23-24 – "The Ministry of Reconciliation" impact your WILLINGNESS to forgive?
8 responses
Yes
No
100%

The session ended with guided journal reflections where the participants answered, "Did the sermon and session from Matthew 5:23-24 impact your willingness to forgive? Each participant indicated that session four's content impacted their willingness to forgive. The chart above shows that 100% of the responding participants answered yes. Below is a table of the individual participant responses to the guided journal question.

Table 12: Session Six -Guided Journal Question Responses

Participant #	Responses.
008	Your ministry cannot be effective until you have reconciled the problem with the person that has hurt you.

002	The Spirit of Offense has kept many people from reconciling with each other. We often become upset when someone has done something painful. Reconciliation is crucial for someone who has been hurt by others. Reconciliation is for both the offender and the victim. Reconciliation is a transformation for the person to move from hurt to healing. This session has helped me understand that I need to work through my emotions and settle my differences with my brothers and sisters. The way we treat others is important to God because He desires us to love one another. When your brother holds something against you, resolving those issues before going to the altar is important. Holding grudges while offering gifts at the altar is contradictory; one must reconcile with others before presenting their gifts. This principle emphasizes the importance of resolving conflicts and fostering forgiveness. Reconciliation with the individual we have a conflict should be our initial step.
003	As I reflected on the sermon and session on Matthew chapter five, what stood out to me the most was that God is more focused on the positioning of one's heart in the treatment of others as opposed to receiving an offering. This continues to reinforce the notion that to be a true disciple of Christ it matters not just our worship to God. But how we treat one another. So, much so that He wants nothing from us other than reconciling with our brothers and sisters in the face of offense.
005	Two things stand out on this session. First the saying of "Are you weak enough to be strong and Strong enough to be weak?" Our feelings do not give a pass on forgiveness. Secondly, the verse reads not if you have an ought with someone has a grudge against you. It is still on you to go and get it right
006	I am hopeful for the future in which I do not operate from a place of offense. I am not sure of the future outcome but it is my prayer to be able to recognize it when it happens and be conscious, God is conscious, of operating from the place of forgiveness. I want to do his will and receive the fullness of God because it is ultimately about me, an individual walk and relationship with God.
004	The ministry of reconciliation sermon had an impact on my willingness to forgive. I learned that it brought me closer to God. I found myself going to God more, asking what it is that I should say or what is the correct way of doing it.
001	I feel like my ministry of reconciliation is because God forgave me and gave me freedom in him that I need to do the same.
007	In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus emphasizes the need for reconciliation and a willingness to forgive in relationships. He teaches that if someone is bringing their gift to the altar and remembers that they have an issue with someone, they should first go and reconcile with that person before offering their gift. In other

	words, you cannot curse someone out or gossip about that person and have beef with that person and come to the altar until you straighten it out with that person then you can go to the altar with your gift.

Summary of Learning

A qualitative data collection method was utilized. Various data collection forms, such as evaluations, assessments, and questionnaires, were used throughout the sessions. These methods included the pre- and post-survey questionnaires and project evaluation. These data collection methods provided triangulation of data for this focus group. The post-surveys and project evaluations were completed in the final session. The problem in this context is that church leadership is not consistently carrying out the duties they have accepted as leaders. This research project hypothesizes that if the members of New Home AME Zion Church are taught about the effects of unforgiveness, they will increase their willingness to forgive. There was a total of eight participants. Six participants attended all six sessions. Two participants attended four sessions. The learnings gained by the project participants related to maturing and being willing to forgive produced ways that others can use to develop that maturity further. The post-survey revealed that focus group participants discovered new perspectives on forgiveness and reconciliation. The question was asked, “How do you define forgiveness?” The responses revealed participants increased their awareness of the ill effects of unforgiveness and their willingness to be more forgiving. Those responses can be found in the Table 12.

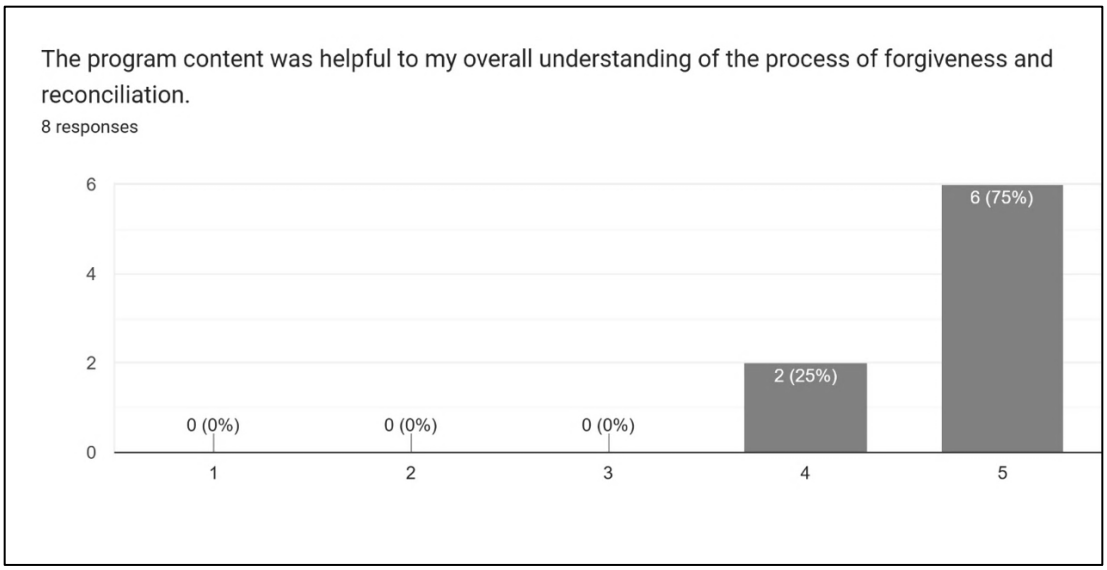
Table 13: Post-Survey Response - How do you define forgiveness?

The ability to forgive someone who has caused you hurt. We forgive others because God has forgiven us.
Forgiveness is willing to put aside your feelings of towards someone who has hurt you.
Making peace with someone that has mistreated you in many ways example gossip, stolen from you, disgraced you in many ways.
My definition of forgiveness is doing what I want God to do for me and to do God's will.
As granting the same grace to others that God has given to us.
The ability to reconcile with an offender despite offense. When you can acknowledge you have been wrong but you can let go of the residue of being wronged to show grace despite the offense. The act of forgiveness keeps us in alignment with God.
The ability to make a conscious decision to release or let go of people or situational things that has cause hurt or harm to you

Conclusion

The implementation of this project was based on a project proposal that a solution was needed to better understand the ill effects of unforgiveness within New Home AME Zion Church. This study was deemed successful because the project analysis led to a better understanding of the forgiveness process. The participant input in their journal entry responses shows that each session successfully impacted the participants' willingness to forgive. The journal activity measured the willingness to forgive each participant who attended.

After the project was completed, it was noted that the original hypothesis could be adjusted by adding the benefits of forgiveness as it pertains to leadership in the church. A restated hypothesis would be one that includes acknowledging that the local church could increase its willingness to forgive among the leadership and laity of the church. This project could have also included more leaders within the church who have had personal trust issues or who have been unsuccessful in specific leadership tasks due to unforgiveness. This information was very insightful and would broaden the scope of the problem within the church in the ranks of both leadership and laity. If the project is repeated, I would have done a demographic survey to pull in the effects of unforgiveness in various generational categories and space the project into weekly sessions. This may provide a more extended base of data across different age and gender groups. That could lead to even more insightful results. The use of a forgiveness assessment could have also provided a clearer path on which the participant can be more willing to forgive. I would also have included a broader aspect of the racial context of forgiveness and reconciliation by including the model teachings of the book entitled *The Enslaved Church* by Anthony Campolo and Micheal Battle. That would give my context a better view of the racial implications of forgiveness and reconciliation. Listed in the chart below are the results of asking the participants if this project was helpful to their overall understanding of the process of forgiveness and reconciliation, the results are listed in the following chart:



These results indicate that the program was helpful overall. Twenty-five percent of participants rated the project's overall effect on their understanding of forgiveness and willingness to forgive as four, and 75% rated it five.

Some participants found it challenging to return journal entries in a timely manner using the electronic data collection method. If I were to do it again, I would use handwritten journal entries or have the participants reply electronically before leaving. Some participants also found it difficult to get back home and return a journal entry right away from surveys and questionnaires. It was challenging to continue breaking the discussion for data collection.

Overall, this project taught me that New Home AME Zion Church parishioners are determined, self-aware, and willing to learn about models and techniques that produce transformation change. The biblical foundation chapter speaks to the power of overcoming the hurt among family members and the undeniable peace felt among a family that was torn apart by hurt and pain and brought back together through forgiveness and reconciliation. The historical foundation chapter shows how the protestant

reformation was started, as a result of one leader seeking emotional, spiritual, and theological relief from a system that was proven to be taking advantage of God's people through religious corruption, ultimately gathering those of like-minded intent that turned into a movement we know as the Protestant Reformation. Soteriology encompasses the entire process of forgiveness and reconciliation. The doctrine of salvation, repentance theology, and relational theology influence the Christology and Ecclesiology of soteriology.

Finally, the interdisciplinary foundation chapter captures how Social Psychology speaks to the behavior of those working together in a community and how forgiveness plays an intricate part in the community. There are several models that influence the process of forgiveness from a therapeutic perspective that speaks to the factors of forgiveness. Relationships in God's kingdom are essential to God and his people. It is God's desire that his creation live peacefully among each other by loving him, themselves, and others through the process of forgiveness and reconciliation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Akhtar, S. and J. Barlow. "Forgiveness Therapy for the Promotion of Mental Well-Being: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis." *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse* 19 (2018): 107-122.

Andrews, Dee and Kathryn Zabelle Derounian. "Notes and Documents." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 108, no. 4 (1984): 471–516.

Appold, Kenneth G. "Lutheran-Reformed Relations: A Brief Historical Overview." *The Journal of Presbyterian History 1997-95*, no. 2 (2017): 52–56.

Augsburger, David W. *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures: Pathways and Patterns*. First Ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992.

Balázs, Zoltán. "Forgiveness and Repentance." *Public Affairs Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (2000): 105–127. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40441280.

Bangs, Carl. "The Inward Cross." *The Journal of Religion* 33, no. 1 (1953): 82. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1199761.

Barth, Markus and Helmut Blanke. *Colossians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Translated by Astrid B. Beck. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021. https://doi.org/10.5040/9780300261714?locatt=label: secondary_theologyAndReligionOnline.

Bartlett, Robert. *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?: Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013.

Bash, Anthony. "Did Jesus Discover Forgiveness?" *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 41, no. 3 (2013): 382–399. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24586075.

Baskin, T. W. and R. D. Enright. "Intervention Studies on Forgiveness: A Meta-Analysis." *Journal of Counseling and Development* 82 (2004): 79-90.

Baumeister, R. F., J. J. Exline, and K. L. Sommer. “The Victim Role, Grudge Theory, and Two Dimensions of Forgiveness.” In *Dimensions of Forgiveness: Psychological Research and Theological Speculations*. Philadelphia, PA: The Templeton Foundation Press, 1998.

Bevere, John. *The Bait of Satan, 20th Anniversary Edition: Living Free from the Deadly Trap of Offense*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2014.

Bray, Gerald. “Jesus’ Accomplishment of Salvation.” In *Lexham Survey of Theology*. Edited by Mark Ward et al. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018.

Brett, Mark G. *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity*, *Old Testament Readings.* London, UK: Routledge, 2000.

Brown, Francis, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs. *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon.* Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1977.

Burton, Nathan S. “Fatherhood and Forgiveness.” *The American Journal of Theology* 9, no. 2 (1905): 275–289. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3154496.

Cairns, Earle E. *Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996.

Campolo, Anthony, and Michael Battle. *The Church Enslaved: A Spirituality of Racial Reconciliation*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005.

Carroll, A. “Are You Looking at Me? Understanding and Managing Paranoid Personality Disorder.” *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment* (2009).

Carter, Tim. *The Forgiveness of Sins*. 1st ed. Cambridge, UK: The Lutterworth Press, 2016. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1f89ts1.

Chafer, Lewis Sperry. *Systematic Theology*. Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948.

Chiel, Hillel J. "Joseph, The Master of Dreams." *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 39, no. 1 (2005): 5–20.

Couenhoven, Jesse. “Forgiveness and Restoration: A Theological Exploration.” *The Journal of Religion* 90, no. 2 (2010): 148–70. https://doi.org/10.1086/649846.

Cox, Benjamin D. and Susan Ackerman. "Rachel's Tomb." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 1 (2009): 137.

Cox, Susie S. *A Forgiving Workplace: An Investigation of Forgiveness Climate, Individual Differences and Workplace Outcomes*. Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest LLC, 2008.

Creswell, John W. and J. David Creswell. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018.

Demarest, Bruce A. *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation (Foundations of Evangelical Theology).* Vol. 1. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997.

DiBlasio, Fredrick A. "The Use of a Decision-Based Forgiveness Intervention Within Intergenerational Family Therapy." *Journal of Family Therapy* 20 (1998): 77-96. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6427.00069.

Eckman, James P. *Exploring Church History.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002.

Elwell, Walter A. and Barry J. Beitzel. "Reconciliation." In *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988.

Emerick, Barrett. *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: The Moral Psychology of Forgiveness*. London, UK: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017.

Emmons, R. *Forgiveness: Theory, Research, and Practice*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 2000.

Enright, Robert. "Reflecting on Thirty Years of Forgiveness Science: What were the Developments in this Field and Where is it Headed Next?" Psychology Today. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-forgiving-life/201904/reflecting-30-years-forgiveness-science.

Enright, R. D. and R. L. Zell. "Problems Encountered when we Forgive One Another." *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 8 (1989): 52–60.

Evans, Craig, Joel N. Lohr, and David Peterson. *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception and Interpretation.* Leiden, NE: Brill Publishing, 2012.

Fincham, F. D. and R. W. May. "Toward a Psychology of Divine Forgiveness: Two Initial Component Analysis." *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 15, no. 2 (2023): 174–183. https://doi.org/10.1037/rel0000426.

Finlan, Stephen. "Deification in Jesus' Teaching." In *Theosis II: Deification in Christian Theology*. Volume 2. Edited by Vladimir Kharlamov. Cambridge, UK: The Lutterworth Press, 2012. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1cgf30h.6.

Finn, Daniel K. *Christian Economic Ethics: History and Implications*. Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Media, 2013.

Friedman, R. E. "Deception for Deception." *Bible Review* 2, no. 1 (1986): 27.

Frykholm, Amy. “Urgency: Martin Luther.” In *Christian Understandings of the Future: The Historical Trajectory*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016.

Gandgev P. “Forgiveness: A Note for Psychiatrists.” *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* (2009).

Gibbs, Robert. *Why Ethics?: Signs of Responsibilities*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7smrc.19.

Gleason, Archer Jr. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction.* Chicago, IL: Moody, 1974.

Goins, Stephanie. “Forgiveness Language in the Literatures.” In *Forgiveness and Reintegration: How the Transformative Process of Forgiveness Impacts Child Soldier Reintegration*. Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Media, 2015. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1ddcpm0.9.

Graves, Jr., Wilfred. *In Pursuit of Wholeness: Experiencing God's Salvation for the Total Person*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2011.

Grudem, Wayne, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Nottingham, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1994.

Gunton, Colin E. Editor. *The Theology of Reconciliation*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003. ProQuest Ebook Central. https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=742784.

Hagerland, Tobias. “Jesus and the Rites of Repentance.” *New Testament Studies* 52, no. 2 (2006): 166–187.

Hamme, Joel T. “Salvation.” in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014.

Hargrave, Terry D. and James N. Sells. “The Development of a Forgiveness Scale.” *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 23, no. 1 (1997): 41–62.

Hillerbrand, Hans J. “Was There a Reformation in the Sixteenth Century?” *Church History* 72, no. 3 (2003): 525–552.

Merriam-Webster. *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary.* Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003.

Hughes, Martin. “Forgiveness.” *Analysis* 35, no. 4 (1975): 113–117. https://doi.org/10.2307/3327541.

Jones, L. Gregory. *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995.

Kaiser, Walter. *New Perspectives on the Old Testament*. Waco, TX: Word, 1970.

Kalayjian, A. and R. F. Paloutzian. Editors. *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Psychological Pathways to Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding*. New York, NY: Springer Science + Business Media, 2009.

Kapic, Kelley M., and Wesley Vander Lugt. *Pocket Dictionary of the Reformed Tradition*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013.

Kangil, Kim. "A Theology of Forgiveness: Theosis in Matthew 18:15–35." *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 16, no. 1 (June 2022): 40–56. doi: https://doi.org/10.5325/jtheointe.16.1.0040.

Katzoff, Charlotte. "Divine Causality and Moral Responsibility in the Story of Joseph and His Brothers." *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly* 47 (1998): 21–40.

Keesmaat, Sylvia C. and Neil Elliott. "Colossians." In *The Letters and Legacy of Paul: Fortress Commentary on the Bible Study Edition*. Edited by Margaret Aymer, Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, and David A. Sánchez. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2016. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1b3t6ns.17.

Khoddam, Rubin. "The Psychology of Forgiveness: A How-To Guide on the Science Behind Learning to Forgive." Psychology Today. https://www.psychologytoday.com/ us/ blog/the-addiction-connection/201409/the-psychology-forgiveness.

Kiecker, James G. *Martin Luther and The Long Reformation: From Response to Reform in the Church*. Milwaukee, WI: Northwest Publishing House, 1992.

Kitchen, Kenneth. *Ancient Orient and Old Testament.* Chicago, IL: InterVarsity, 1966.

Kleinhans, Robert G. "Luther and Erasmus, Another Perspective." *Church History* 39, no. 4 (1970): 459–469.

Knell, Matthew. *Sin, Grace and Free Will: A Historical Survey of Christian Thought.* Volume 2. Cambridge, UK: The Lutterworth Press, 2018.

Kovacs, Kenneth E. *The Relational Theology of James E. Loder: Encounter and Conviction*. New York, NY: Peter Lang AG International Academic Publishers, 2011.

Kurian, George Thomas. *Nelson's New Christian Dictionary: The Authoritative Resource on the Christian World*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001.

Lachower, Fischel, Isaiah Tishby, and David Goldstein. “Repentance.” In *The Wisdom of the Zohar: Anthology of Texts*. Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 1989. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1rmkc9.34.

Lauritzen, Paul. “Forgiveness: Moral Prerogative or Religious Duty?” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 15, no. 2 (1987): 141–154. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40015063.

Lee, John D., John Hatchard, Samuel D. Hazard, and Howard & Evans. *The Story of Joseph & His Brethren : In Four Parts. Documents.* London, UK: London Publishers and Printers, 1811.

Levenson, Alan T. *Joseph: Portraits Through the Ages*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2016.

Longman, Tremper, III and David E. Garland. *The Expositors Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007.

Longman, Tremper, III and Raymond B. Dillard. *Introduction to the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006.

Lose, David J. *Making Sense of Martin Luther*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press. 2017.

Lull, Timothy F. and Derek R. Nelson. *Resilient Reformer: The Life and Thought of Martin Luther*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015.

Lundy, Brandon D., A. G. Adebayo, and Sherrill Hayes. Editors. *Atone: Religion, Conflict, and Reconciliation Conflict and Security in the Developing World*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018.

MacComb, Samuel. “Faith According to Paul.” *The Biblical World* 25, no. 4 (1905): 292–299. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3140463.

Marable, Manning. “The Meaning of Faith in the Black Mind in Slavery.” *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 30, no. 4 (1976): 248–64.

Marino, Gordon. Editor. “Repentance/Forgiveness.” In *The Quotable Kierkegaard*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014.

Marshall, Peter. *Remembering the Reformation: Martin Luther and Catholic Theology*. Edited by Declan Marmion, Salvador Ryan, and Gesa E. Thiessen. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017.

McCullough, M. E., L. M. Root, and A. D. Cohen. “Writing About the Benefits of an Interpersonal Transgression Facilitates Forgiveness.” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 74 (2006): 887–897.

McFadyen, John E. "Expository Studies in the Old Testament: IV. Joseph." *The Biblical World* 29, no. 4 (1907): 302.

McGrath, Alister E. *The Christian Theology Reader*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley and Sons, Incorporated, 2016.

McMickle, Marvin Andrew. *An Encyclopedia of African American Christian Heritage*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2002.

New Church Story. "What is Forgiveness?- Dr. Worthington." YouTube. June 16, 2021, 1:42. https://youtu.be/bJ1lOygJwpA?si=tx6fIu9YeTn2Nb_R.

Nunney, S. J. and A. S. R. Manstead. "Improving the Effectiveness of Intergroup Apologies: The Role of Apology Content and Moral Emotions, Peace and Conflict." *Journal of Peace Psychology* 27, no. 3 (2021): 436–448. https://doi.org/10.1037/pac0000571.

O'Callaghan, Paul. *God and Mediation: Retrospective Appraisal of Luther the Reformer.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017.

O'Collins, Gerald G. "Salvation." *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992.

Oord, Thomas J., Brian Montgomery, and Karen S. Winslow. *Relational Theology: A Contemporary Introduction*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012.

Osborne, Grant R. R. *Colossians and Philemon Verse by Verse*. Oak Harbor, WA: Lexham Press, 2016.

Ovey, Michael J. *The Feasts of Repentance: From Luke-Acts to Systematic and Pastoral Theology*. Edited by D. A. Carson. Lilse, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=5844141.

Paraclete Press. "The Power of Forgiveness with Dr. Everett L. Worthington." May 10, 2012. YouTube, 4:35. https://youtu.be/UF-HrXu6kvc?si=DoaB6vM5V3ImZZy_.

Pascal, Roy. "Martin Luther and His Times." *Science and Society* 2, no. 3 (1938): 332–347.

Post, Stephen G. *Unlimited Love: Altruism, Compassion, and Service*. Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2008. http://www.myilibrary.com?id=326082.

Rae, M.A. *God of Salvation: Soteriology in Theological Perspective.* Edited by I.J. Davidson. First Edition. New England, UK: Routledge, 2011. https://doi-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.4324/9781315585260.

Richards, P., G.E. Scott, Kawika Allen, and Daniel K. Judd. *Handbook of Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapies – Back Matter*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2023. http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.Proquest.com /books/handbook-spiritually-integrated-psychotherapies/docview/2783217082/se-2.

Ripley, Jennifer. "Worthington on Forgiveness Session Five – Reconciliation." YouTube. https://youtu.be/rLlDCvrC4h0?si=taEM5YFZWW6iStny.

Robinson, Jacob Gordon. *The Theo-Ethics of Howard Thurman: Reconciliation and Beyond*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University, 2018. http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/theo-ethics-howard-thurman-reconciliation-beyond/docview/2211175692/se-2.

Rodrigues, Adriani Milli. "Atonement." In *Lexham Theological Wordbook*. Edited by Douglas Mangum et al. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014.

Russell, William R. "The Theological 'Magna Charta' of Confessional Lutheranism." *Church History* 64, no. 3 (1995): 389–398.

Ryrie, Charles C. *Basic Theology*. Victor Books, Wheaton, IL, 1987.

———. *So Great Salvation*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989.

Sadler, Rodney S. and Sarah Shectman. *The Pentateuch: Fortress Commentary on the Bible Study Edition*. Edited by Gale A. Yee, Hugh R. Page, and Matthew J. M. Coomber. Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Media, 2016.

Sam, N. "Social Psychology." Psychology Dictionary Professional Reference. https://psychologydictionary.org/social-psychology/.

Sánchez, David A., Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, and Margaret P. Aymer. Editors. *The Letters and Legacy of Paul*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2016. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/j.ctt1b3t6ns.

Scarre, Geoffrey. "On Taking Back Forgiveness." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 19, no. 4 (2016): 931–944. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24762666.

Schaff, Philip and David Schley Schaff. *History of the Christian Church*. Volume 7. New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910.

Scheuer, Blaženka. *The Return of YHWH: The Tension Between Deliverance and Repentance in Isaiah 40–55*. Berlin, NY: De Gruyter, 2008. https://doi-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.1515/9783110211023.

Schwartz, Barry L. *Path of the Prophets: The Ethics-Driven Life*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2018.

Sells, James N., and Terry D. Hargrave. “Forgiveness: A Review of the Theoretical and Empirical Literature.” *Journal of Family Therapy* 20 (1998): 21–36.

Speiser, E.A. *Genesis. The Anchor Bible Genesis Introduction, Translation and Notes, Company, Inc.* Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1964.

Stratis, Justin. “Actual Sin.” *Lexham Survey of Theology*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018.

Swanson, James. *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997.

Tombs, David. “The Offer of Forgiveness.” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 36, no. 4 (2008): 587–93. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40378023.

Thurman, Howard. “The Discipline of Reconciliation.” *Journal of Religion and Health* 3, no. 1 (1963): 7–26. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27504601.

Van der Kooi, Cees. "Three Models of Reconciliation: A Christian Approach." In *Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation*. Leiden, NED: Brill, 2002. doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004494671_012.

Varickayil, Robert. “Social Origins of Protestant Reformation.” *Social Scientist* 8, no. 11 (1980): 14–31.

Watts, Fraser. *Living Deeply: A Psychological and Spiritual Journey*. First Edition. Cambridge, UK: The Lutterworth Press, 2018. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjsf4r8.12.

Weitzel, Shelby. “On the Relationship Between Forgiveness and Resentment in the Sermons of Joseph Butler.” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (2007): 237–253. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27745094.

Wengert, Timothy J. *The Annotated Luther: The Roots of Reform*. Edited by Timothy J. Wengert, Hans J. Hillerbrand, and Kirsi I. Stjerna. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015.

Wenham, Gordon J. *Word Biblical Commentary*. Vol. 2. Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1994.

Wilson, John. “Why Forgiveness Requires Repentance.” *Philosophy* 63, no. 246 (1988): 534–535. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3750636.

Wood, Leon James and David O'Brien. *A Survey of Israel's History*. Grand Rapids, MI: Academia Books, 1986.

Woodson, Carter G. *The History of the Negro Church*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1921.

Worthington, Everett L. *Forgiving and Reconciliation: Bridges Wholeness and Hope.* Downs Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003.

———. *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Theory and Application.* New York, NY: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2006.

Worthington, E. and S. Sandage. "Forgiveness and Spirituality in Psychotherapy." American Psychological Association. https://www-r2library-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/Resource/Title/1433820315.

Worthington, Jr., Everett L. and Micheal Scherer. "Forgiveness is an Emotion-Focused Coping Strategy that can Reduce Health Risks and Promote Health Resilience: Theory, Review, and Hypotheses." *Psychology and Health* 19, no. 3 (2004): 385-405. doi 10.1080/0887044042000196674.

Worthington, Jr., E. L. and N. G. Wade. "The Psychology of Unforgiveness and Forgiveness and Implications for Clinical Practice." *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 18, no. 4 (1999): 385-418. doi: https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.1999.18.4.385.

Wright, Peter and Hamish Macleod. *Get Set for Psychology.* Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2006. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g0b0ht.10.